

DRAGON+

THE D&DIY ISSUE

D&DIY:
Your craftiest
homebrew
projects



Dungeon
Mapping:
Explore the
cartographer's art

Paint by Numbers:
A beginner's
guide to painting
miniatures

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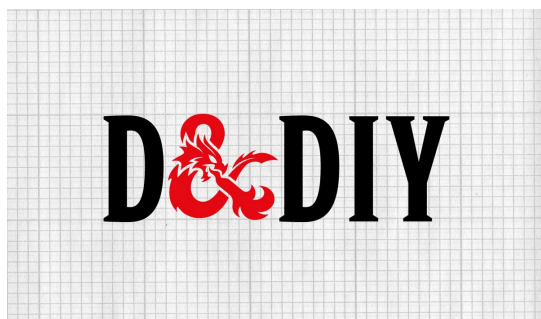
ISSUE 11



DRAGON+ 11

Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 11

Senior creative art director
Shauna Narciso on composing
the digital face of *Dragon+*.



D&DIY

Explore our treasure trove of
DIY and homemade D&D
projects.



Imagining the Ampersand

Unfolding the Art of Deception



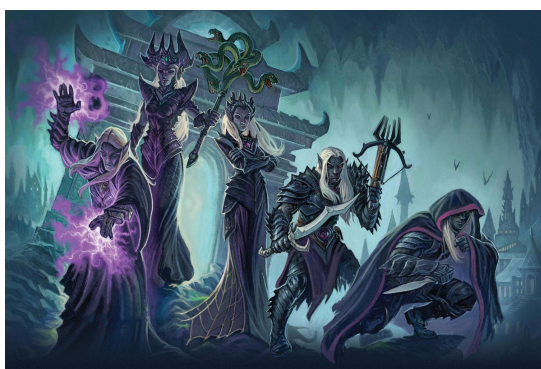
Concepting the Creatures

Learn what it takes to create the art for *Volo's Guide to Monsters*!



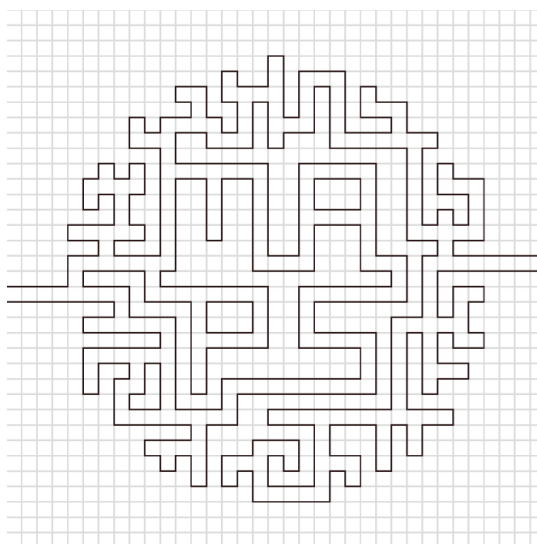
What's in Your Bag?

Your responses to our community question: What strange things might be found in a giant's bag?



Expanding the Underdark

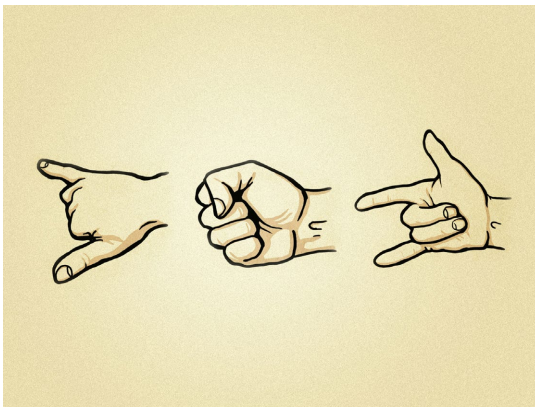
Gale Force Nine provides an exclusive look at the new expansion for *Tyrants of the Underdark*



Dungeon Mapping

Mapmaker supreme Mike Schley discusses the joy of cartography





Rock Paper Wizard

Prepare for a magical battle involving strategy, tactics, and—most of all—fun!

Paint by Numbers

Bring your miniatures to life with Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures.

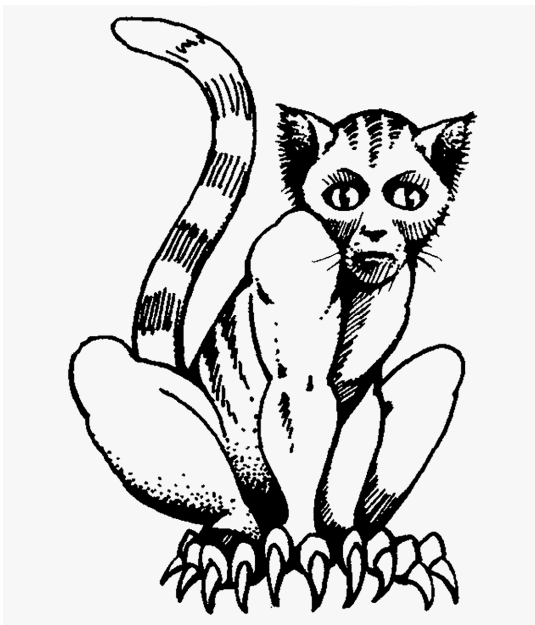


Fiction: Return to the Steading

We return to a famed steading—though one no longer ruled by a hill giant chief.

D&Design

Go wild! But start basic . . . and also, go wild!



Lore You Should Know: Tabaxi vs. tabaxi



The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

We look into the DMs Guild to discover the secrets of the priestess by Jason Thompson.



D&D Classics: Great Stoney

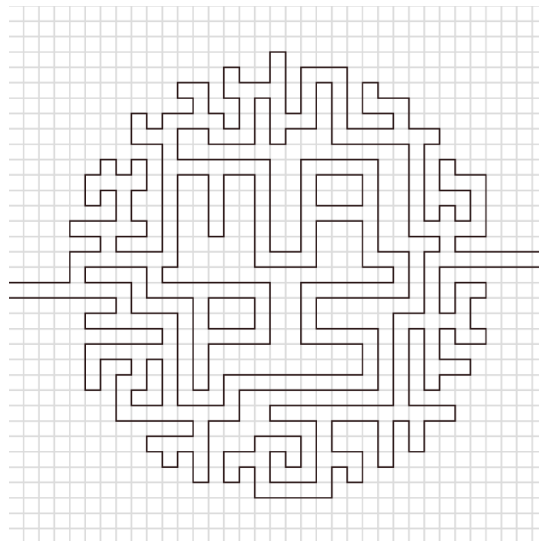
From the Dragon archives, a grand tour of Great Stoney



Streaming Highlights

Critical Role are still on a roll, Misscliks supports female role models in gaming and geekdom,

and Mike Schley peels back the layers of the cartographer's art.



Unearthed Arcana: Druids

Mike Mearls and Jeremy Crawford sprout new options for the druid

Maps of the Month: Storm King's Thunder

For this issue, we're pleased to offer a selection of maps from Storm King's Thunder



Next Issue: Dragon+

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Get ready to be seriously motivated, as Dragon+ presents a special inspiration issue.

DRAGON+ 11

Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 11

Senior creative art director Shauna Narciso on composing the digital face of *Dragon+*.

Shauna Narciso

When D&D's fifth edition was delivered into the welcoming arms of players, the reception was overwhelmingly positive. Dungeons & Dragons had new rules and a new look. It was time to embark on a new online presence. We named it Dragon+, not worrying for a minute about how much the internet hated the symbols "+" and "&," but just excited to let people know that the D&D magazine was back and you could enjoy it for free online.

So what better place to signal a new start than on the digital face of the new magazine?

With the revamped D&D logo in hand, we began asking artists to incorporate their interpretation of the Dragon+ ampersand into each cover. Eleven covers later, we're still surprised and delighted with their solutions.



1) Emi Tanji, 2) Hydro 74, 3) Virginie Ropars, 4) Lars Larsen, 5) Todd James, 6) Chuck Lukacs, 7) Goni Montes, 8) Scott Kurtz, 9) Tyler Jacobson, 10) Ray Villafane, 11) Robert Lang

The first Dragon+ cover was Emi Tanji's work. You'll find more of her considerable talents in this issue's [interview](#). In issue 2, artist Hydro74 killed with his skulls and roses, and left us wanting more. For issue 3, Virginie Ropars seduced us with a tamed ampersand draped around Zuggtmoy's neck. Issue 4 introduced us to the brilliance of electronics designer and multimedia artist Lars Larsen.

Jump ahead to the current issue. I first discovered Dr. Robert Lang's origami in the February 19, 2007, issue of the New Yorker, [in an article by Susan Orlean](#). Nine years later, I was still so struck by his accomplishments that when it came time to commission another Dragon+ cover, I tracked down the article, Googled Dr. Lang's whereabouts, and contacted him with my request. He agreed that the

ampersand deserved an origami interpretation, and proceeded to fold it from a single sheet of paper. Breathtaking in its elegance, the origami ampersand, along with its crease pattern, can be found in this issue's “ [About the Ampersand](#).”

From our viewpoint, each cover of Dragon+ is a unique work of art. The one constant—the dragon ampersand—is there to signify all things D&D and the rich promise of the game. D&D art directors fulfill that promise by pairing the right artist with the right commission, writing an art order that explains the job, and adhering to a deadline that's never long enough. Whether it's graphic design, traditional painting, handcrafted sculpture, or digital photography, each Dragon+ cover is uniquely beautiful and beautifully unique. Our artists charm us with new interpretations, introduce players to new adventures, and invite players everywhere to roam the ever-changing D&D landscape.

It's an amazing thing to witness, and all in the name of the mother of all roleplaying games.

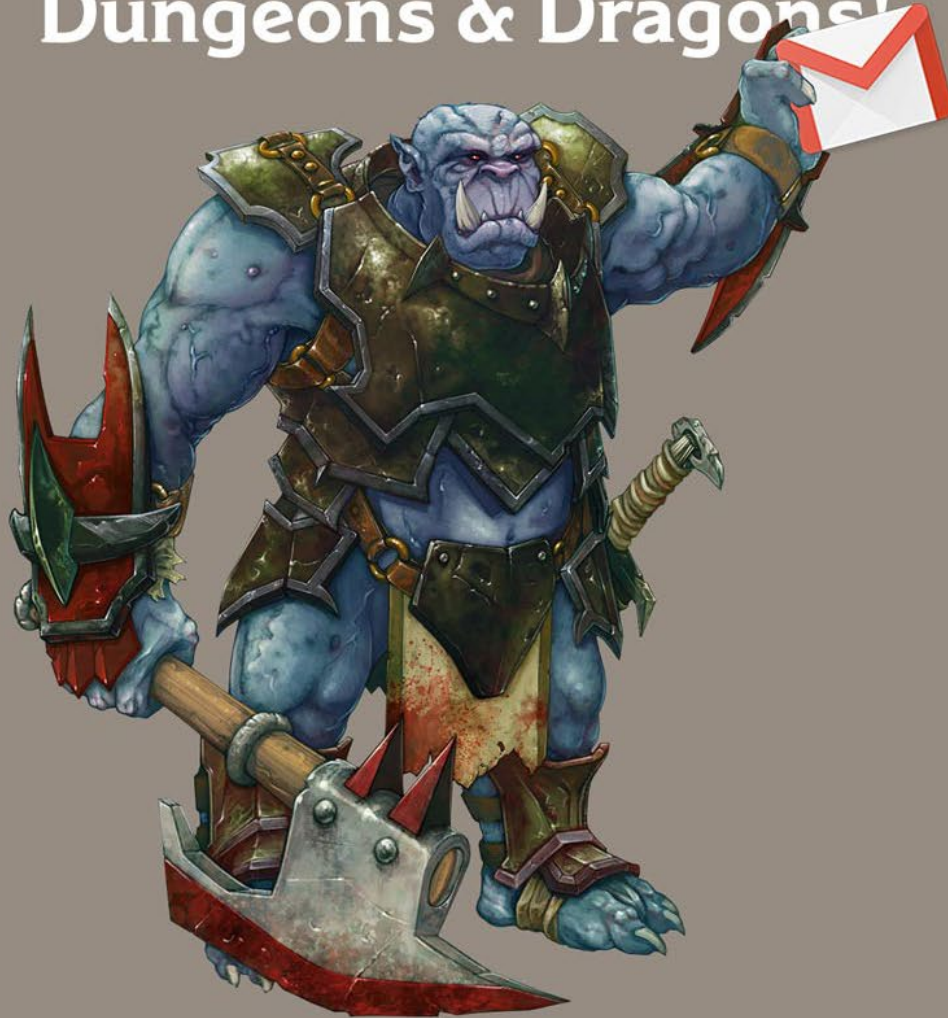
Shauna Narciso, D&D Senior Creative Art Director



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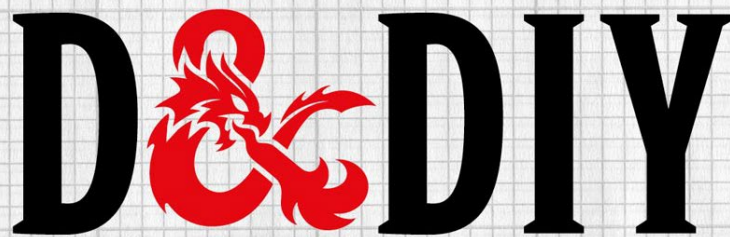
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D&DIY

Explore our treasure trove of DIY and homemade D&D projects.

Players of Dungeons & Dragons have always been fortunate to have access to a ready-made supply of campaigns, miniatures, and resources, as well as a huge archive of adventures stretching back to the earliest years of the game. But getting your hands dirty, doing your own thing, and making homebrew adventures, arts, crafts, and playing aids has always been a long and noble part of the D&D tradition.

With this issue's theme being D&DIY, we thought we'd have a look at the current state of Dungeons & Dragons crafting—and take delight in what's being created by players and fans. This article highlights some of the newer, finer, and most exotic homemade gaming projects, as well as some of the guides and resources that can inspire you to ever-greater creative heights—or that might help start you out on your own D&DIY journey.

Papier Mâché Tiamat



Tiamat is the queen of evil dragons, and [this amazing papier mâché creation](#) sets a high bar for D&DIY creators everywhere. The quality is remarkable, featuring successive layers built up to give a distinctive character to each chromatic dragon head. The detailing is equally impressive, and runs right down to the individual horns, scales, and teeth that bring Tiamat to such startling life. You can almost imagine her caught in a moment of snarling fury as she confronts a party of unfortunate adventurers.

Tiamat was created by Dan (the monster man) Reeder, a papier mâché artist who has been making models since the early seventies. His goal in life is to spread the word about this underrated art form, and with projects as stunning as this, he's setting a truly inspiring example for others to follow. If you'd like to see Tiamat in all her finished glory, she's now adorning the walls of the [Chromatic Dragon](#) restaurant and gamer pub in Savannah, Georgia—which is itself worthy of a callout for its aesthetics!

(For those looking for a more ready-made wall-hanging option, we'll also point out [WizKids' D&D red dragon trophy plaque](#), available through a number of retailers.)

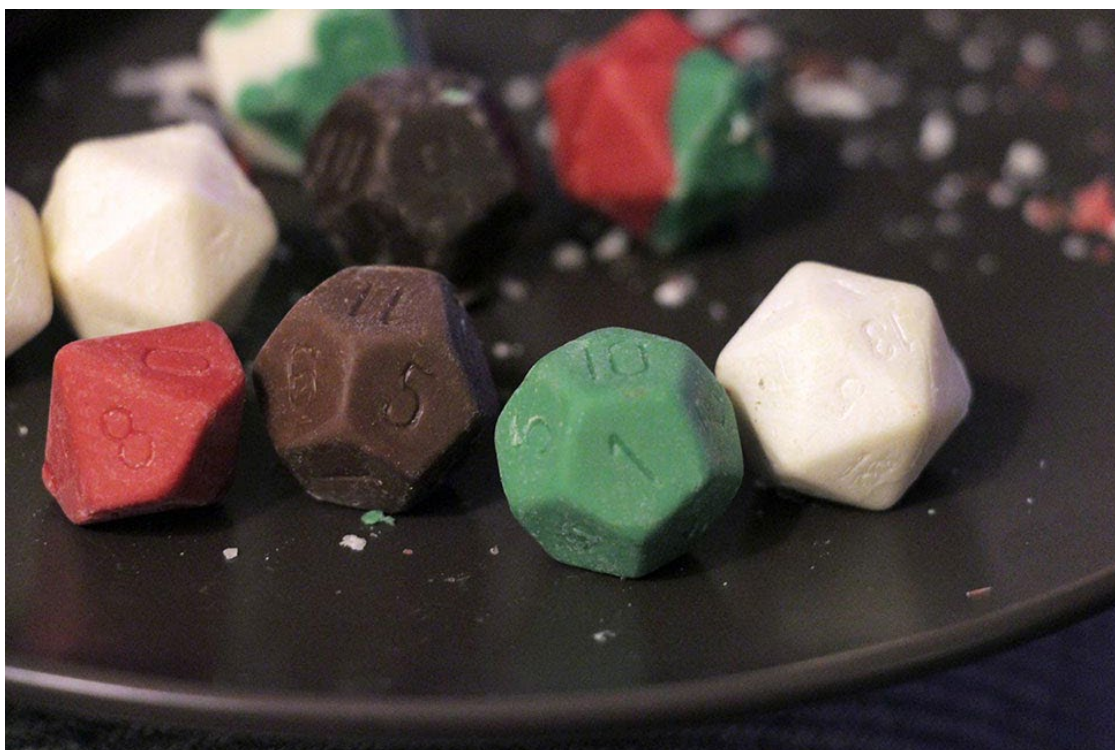
The DM's Craft



If you're new to the world of D&D crafting, the [DM's Craft](#) YouTube channel is a great place to start, as it's chock-full of D&D monsters, terrain, and scenery projects that are ideal for beginners. Best of all, most of the channel's projects can be made from common household goods, recycled or reclaimed materials, or by adapting existing toys or models that you might have lying around.

DM Scotty provides expert advice on everything from how to make the most of your hot glue gun, to building tabletop trees or synthesizing snowy scenery. For the more ambitious, there are also how-to videos for creating miniatures of crazy signature monsters like the watcher in the darkness, the evil brain boss, or a giant purple worm. Slap one of those down on your game table to really amaze and intimidate your players. DM Scotty is an engaging host, and there's no better guidance than his mighty battle cry of, "Go forth and craft!"

Deliciously Edible Dice



There are a number of ways to create your own D&D dice. You **can make origami versions**, design them up to be 3D printed if you have the skills and equipment, or even hand carve custom dice out of wood or bone. But though those are all admirable and challenging techniques, none are quite so satisfying—or, indeed, delicious—as the ability to cast edible chocolate dice.

A project on the **Our Nerd Home** website shows you how to make your own DIY silicone molds that can produce dice of chocolate or white chocolate in a variety of colors. Okay, they might not exactly be practical for most games (though we'd keep any that rolled 20s and would eat every critical failure), but they'll make perfect holiday gifts for the members of your gaming group. Oh, and if you want to make other flavorsome dice, there's even the option to **bake giant gingerbread alternatives**. Dicing delicious.

Paper Craft Minis



We bow down to no one in our love for plastic and metal miniatures (and you can learn how to start painting minis in this issue's “**Paint by Numbers**” feature). But these **RPG-inspired figures from PaperCraftSquare** offer another creative option.

These projects come as free downloadable templates, and give you instant access to a huge range of monsters and creatures. But if you're looking for something more ambitious, why not download and build this **entire medieval village as a base of operations for your adventurers**? PaperCraftSquare is chock full of resources, but if you've got some talent for drawing and coloring, all you need is some thick card, a base, and your imagination to bring a whole menagerie of unique D&D monsters to life.

(As an added note, this issue of *Dragon+* features its own paper craft project in the form of **Great Stoney**. So try your hand at creating this castle whose plans first appeared in *Dragon* magazine in 1984!)

Dungeon Tiles



One of the most popular D&DIY projects is the creation of modular interlocking floor and room tiles, which add instant atmosphere to a game and can be used and reused to create endless dungeon crawls and subterranean locales.

Although you can buy premade molds, casts, and floor tiles, nothing quite beats making your own in order to add that undeniable personal flavor to your adventures. The [DMG Info](#) YouTube channel shows you how, with a playlist's worth of videos and tutorials covering everything from basic floor layouts, to wooden doors and bridges, to treasure hordes, pillars, and furniture. If you manage to work your way through this lot, you'll have a tile set and dungeon designs to cover every possible eventuality.

D&D Dice Towers



Dice towers come in all shapes and sizes, but we were particularly impressed by the work of Paul Mason, the DIY Guy. His **simple dice tower** looks great despite requiring only a minimum amount of work, and can even be personalized with your own designs. The straightforward video shows you how it's all done, and you can download pattern and sticker templates so you'll never make a wrong cut. If you'd like to try something a bit more durable, Board Game Geek's **no-frills, no-nonsense dice tower project** offers a bit more of a challenge, and will provide a subtle test of your woodworking skills without overextending them.

Dice Trays



Dice trays are one D&DIY project almost certainly within the reach of most players. Cloak and Meeple's simple [D&D dice tray](#) shows how to take a regular picture frame and convert it into an impressive-looking tray with minimum effort. The Instructables website offers a similarly [cheap and easy project](#), but you're going to have to build the actual box yourself. This only takes an hour or two, however, and should be readily doable even for D&DIY novices. And if you're looking to make something a bit more sophisticated, this [dice tray Pinterest board](#) should provide plenty of inspiration.

Dice Bag



Keeping your precious dice safe and sound is important, and inspires another useful D&DIY project. The satisfaction of sewing your own dice bag with custom colors and materials is second to none. On YouTube, [Tiffany Teaches](#) offers a quick and easy video tutorial for creating a basic lined bag. But if you prefer to follow step-by-step instructions with good picture support, then the Tally's Treasury website has a great page on [lined dice bags for all your polyhedral needs](#).

A chance to go truly medieval with your gaming can be found with Zac Miller's [amazing chainmail dice bag tutorial](#). You'll need a few specialist tools, a ton of stainless steel rings, and plenty of patience, but not many dice bags look this impressive or feel this weighty in the hand.

(And of course, for those looking for ready-made options, [two monstrous D&D dice pouches](#) are available from UltraPro.)

Gaming Tables



Who hasn't always secretly coveted their own custom gaming table? Though you can invest in some beautiful examples, intrepid

D&DIYers have also been busy creating their own. This [high-end gaming table](#) built by gamer Bum Kim is certainly worth a look (though its nominal DIY cost does not include the built-in 40-inch flat screen TV). Another impressive homegrown gaming table is [this stylish effort](#) from Imgur user Schuggs512, which features integral LED lighting and polished wooden surfaces.

A word of caution, though. Gaming table construction requires a high level of confidence in your woodworking skills and electrical knowledge, and—even more importantly—proper attention to safety procedures. If your DIY skills aren't at that level, consider finding someone who has the skills and who can supervise and teach you. Or perhaps take some shop classes at a local college before embarking on one of these more advanced but ultimately amazing projects.

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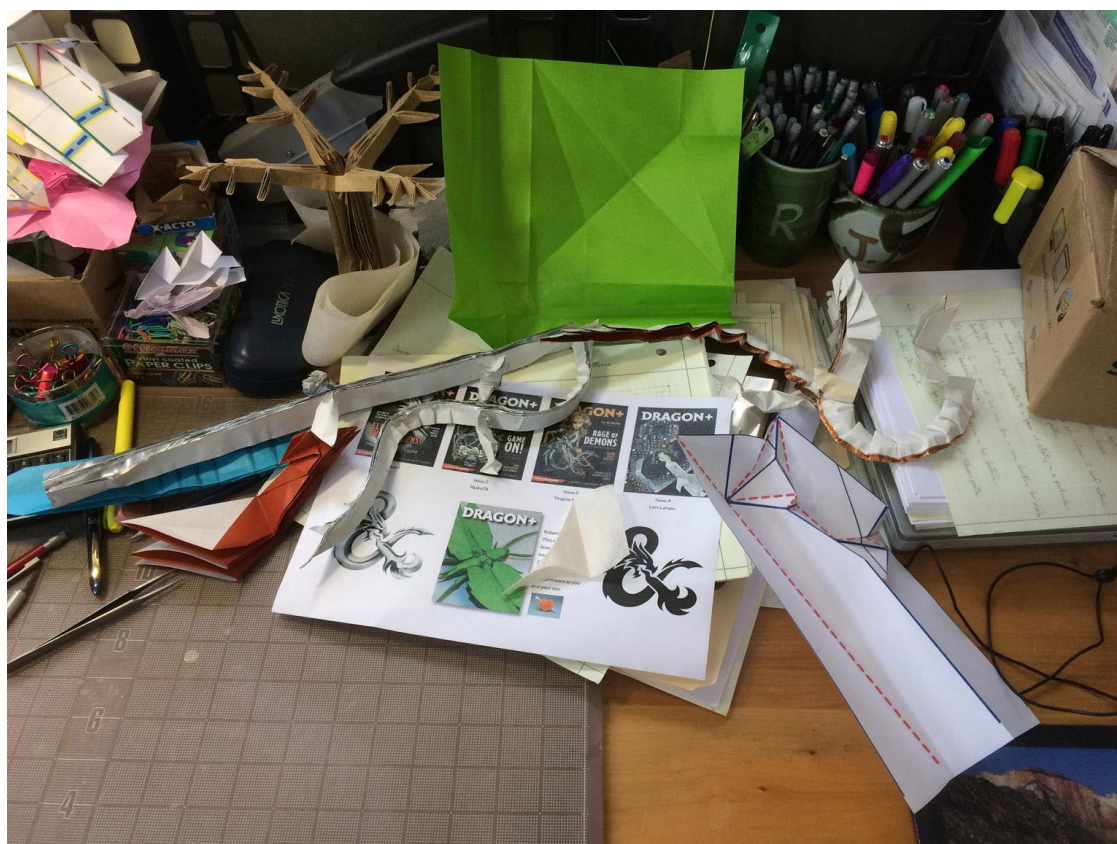
Imagining the Ampersand

Unfolding the Art of Deception

Doctor Robert J. Lang is one of the world's foremost practitioners of the art and science of origami. A physicist, engineer, and R&D manager by trade, he has cultivated his passion for the art of paper folding from a young age, writing numerous books on the subject, and becoming known as one of the pioneers of the cross-disciplinary marriage of origami and mathematics.

Dr. Lang is also the designer and creator of the unique origami dragon ampersand adorning the cover of this issue of *Dragon+*.

We caught up with him to learn more about this ancient art and its applications in the real world, to learn some hints and tips on the best ways to try origami out for yourself, and of course, to learn how he designed and folded that impressive cover.

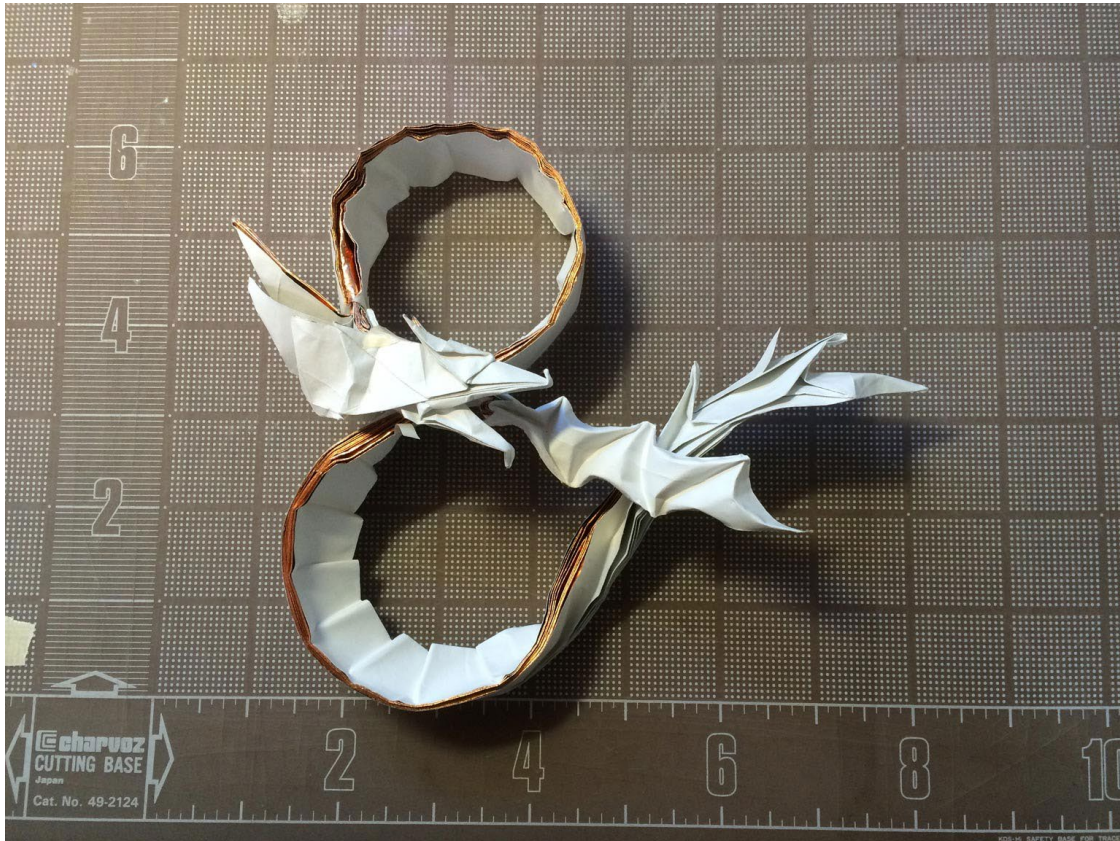


How did you first discover your talent for origami?

I started at age six, when I encountered some instructions in a book of craft projects. That hooked me. That first book contained only a few designs (a frog, spider, crow, and bird), but I folded them over and over. My parents bought me some more books, which further fired my passion, and I scoured the local libraries for more whenever I had the chance.

Eventually, I started trying to make up my own figures, initially by modifying things I had learned, but also by trying to generalize ideas I saw in existing designs. I found I had an aptitude for creating new

origami figures. All of the people I read about had created their own designs, so it seemed only natural that I should too. It wasn't until I met other folders while in my twenties that I realized designing original origami wasn't a common thing.

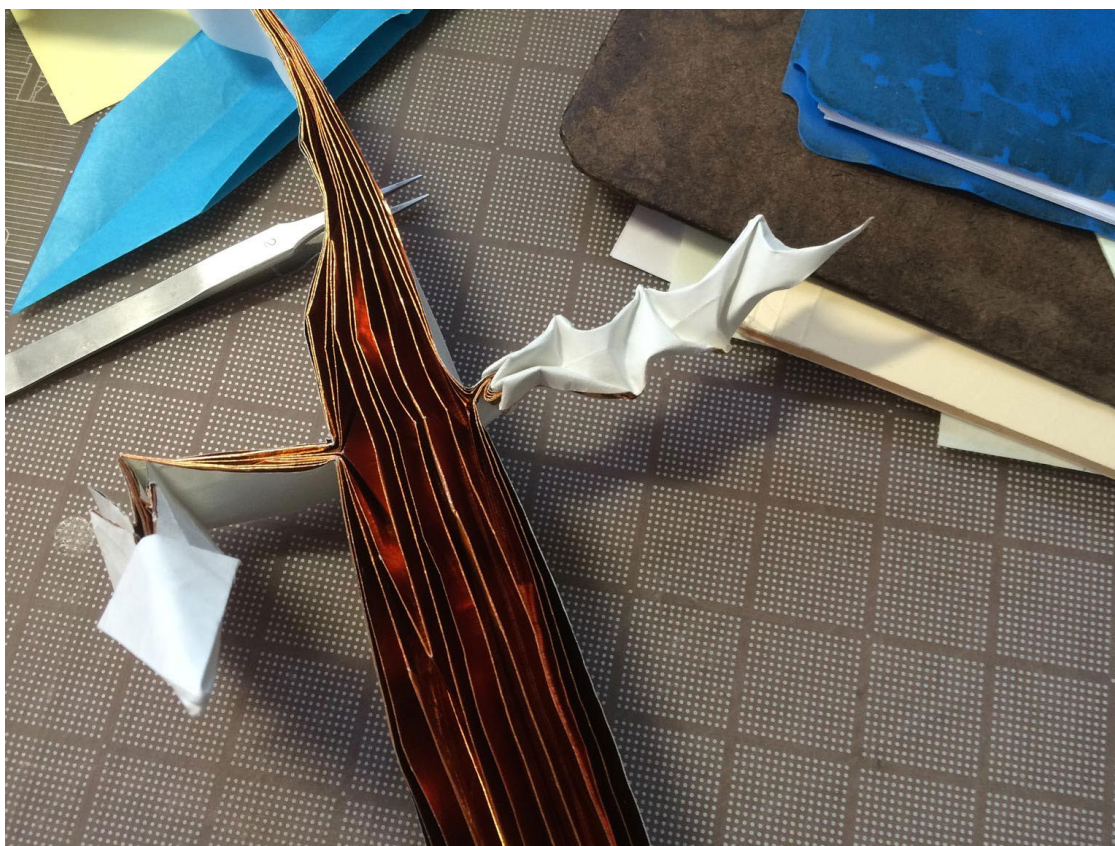


Are you a D&D player yourself?

I'm not a D&Der, though many of my college friends were, and my son (now twenty-six) became a passionate devotee in his teens. His old room in our house is still packed with rulebooks. In fact, I'm not much of a game player at all—except that designing origami is itself a form of puzzle solving, a sort of game. I'm playing against nature and mathematics, but it's still a friendly competition.

Tell us how you designed the origami ampersand for this month's cover of Dragon+?

Well, the goal of the ampersand dragon defined the main lines and structure of the subject. But it presented a bit of a design challenge. If you straightened out the dragon, you'd basically have a long snake with a dragon head at one end. That would have lent itself very nicely to folding from a long strip of paper, but I wanted to use a square—the most common paper shape in origami.



If you want to make a narrow shape whose straight-line length is that of the diagonal of the square, you can fold a shape called a **fish base**, which is a long, skinny shape with the excess paper gathered into two shorter flaps at the midpoint. I knew that when I shaped the body to form the loops of the ampersand, the head would cross the body right around its middle. So I could place the head along the middle of the body, but when the dragon was curled up, the midbody head would appear to be at the end of the long neck. Even better, since there were two flaps at the midpoint, I could use



To make a good-looking head with spikes at the back, I needed more paper than a simple fish base would provide. So I added a design feature called an edge graft that let me add some paper to the head. That modification, in turn, allowed me to use that extra paper to make additional plates around the neck and tail. And with that, the overall design was set.

So how did you fold the dragon to give it such a dramatic appearance?

Of course, there was a great deal more folding to do, adding creases not shown in the crease pattern to curve the body around, and to shape the head and flames. Most importantly, additional folding ensured that the angle of the neck was such that it appeared to be connected to the head, and that the flames (an entirely different flap) appeared to be coming from the mouth.

In the finished work, the neck, head, and flames are three distinct flaps coming from three different corners of the paper, but they appear to be a single connected form in the finished artwork. Origami is, among other things, an art of deception. Whenever you see an origami artwork, you are seeing an uncut square, but one of my goals

as an artist is to deceive you into seeing something else. In this case, having the paper imply a connectivity that is quite different from the reality is especially satisfying.



(Taiwan Goldfish, Opus 716)

Are there other D&D origami projects you'd like to try?

The things that inspire me to design tend to be either purely geometric shapes that require the solution of some interesting mathematical problem, or subjects from nature—primarily animals and arthropods (insects, spiders, and the like). So the bevy of D&D monsters does have a certain allure. A desmodu bat would be a nice future topic, and to exercise my long-legged-critter chops, the ankheg looks pretty interesting.

Because nature figures so strongly in my inspiration, I'm drawn to imaginary creatures that have close natural references. (OK, an ankheg isn't all that natural, but I think of it as a praying mantis having a bad hair day.) Many of my fellow origami artists are deeply into D&D monsters, and my son has a **beholder that was folded for him by fellow artist Joseph Wu**.

What's the best way for Dragon+ readers to give origami a try for themselves?

For a long time, my answer would have been to point them to the many origami books out there. I would suggest my own *Origami in Action* as a good book for beginners and intermediate folders, and for those who want to design their own, my *Origami Design Secrets* from **OrigamiUSA**. But nowadays, there are a lot of great instructional videos available online. The quality varies, but I would suggest those collected at Sara Adams's site **HappyFolding.com**: lots of videos, lots of great models, and all with clear instructions.



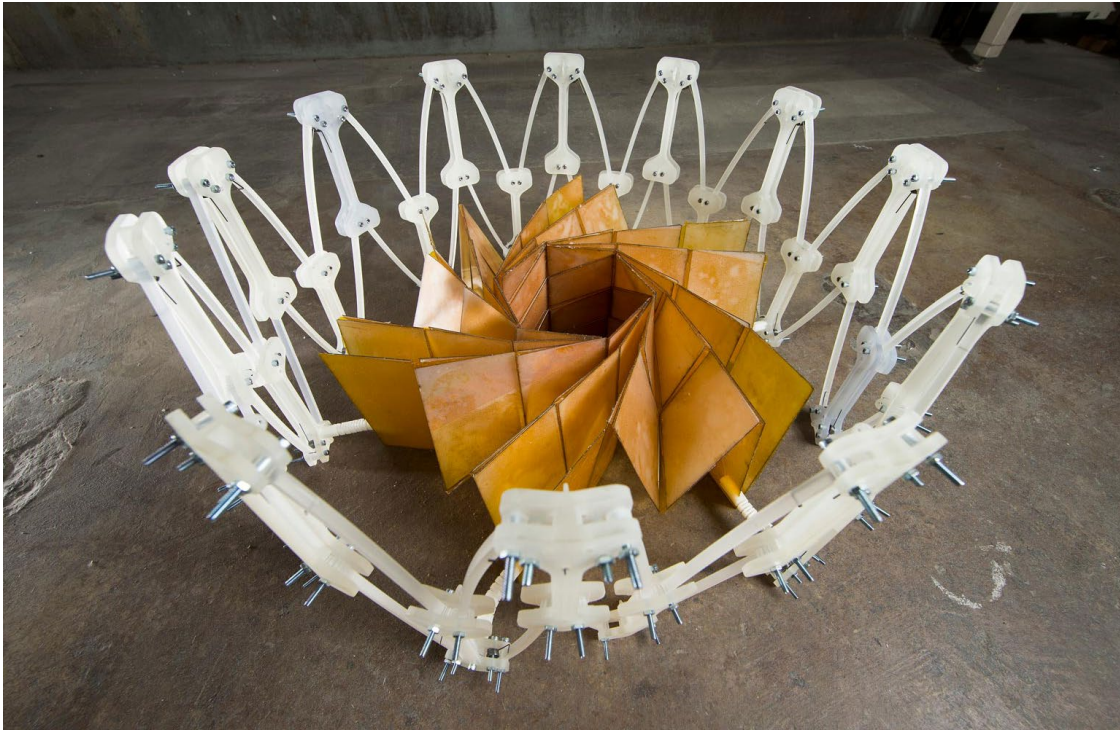
(Lamassus Resurrection)

What are the most interesting developments in origami today?

On the artistic side, modern origami artists have managed to marry deep and complex design with incredible artistic execution. There are now hundreds of origami artists who are doing world-class work, and that work is shown in mainstream art museums. That's a development of the last twenty years or so.

Origami structures and mechanisms have also found applications in creating deployable objects in the world of science and technology. Some of the most interesting things are the big things! Like deployable lenses, antennas, and solar arrays on spacecraft. Japan flew an origami solar array in 1995, based on the work of Koryo Miura. **NASA is developing** a twenty-five-meter solar array for powering outer planetary missions, and the design being developed at

the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, in collaboration with my colleagues at Brigham Young University and myself, is based on a well-known origami structure called a flasher.



(Credit: Brigham Young University)

Origami is a traditional art form, but it has undergone a real change both in its design language and the use of computer aided design. What have the implications of that been?

Computer folks have tried mixing origami and computation for about as long as computers have existed, but beginning in the 1990s, people began seriously developing computational algorithms that could assist in the design of origami figures at a complexity never before attained. Design algorithms turned out to be nontrivial and based on some fairly heavy mathematics. That in turn attracted some of the “big guns” of computer science to turn their analytical attention to origami, solving problems of both mathematical and practical interest.

What turned out to be even more important, though, were the ideas underlying the programs. Origami designers found that they could apply these ideas to do pencil and paper designs that were every bit as complex as what the origami design programs could do. So origami design came full circle: first done intuitively, then computationally, and finally, back to using only one’s own brain—but now a brain deeply informed by computational ideas.

How do you approach designing your origami artworks and sculptures?

It varies a lot. For many of my geometric designs, I write computer programs in a computing environment called **Mathematica** that solves the crease patterns needed to create the 3D shape I'm after. You can see an example at the **Wolfram Demonstrations** project. These are often motivated as much by the mathematics as by a goal for a particular shape. Thinking about different classes of shape leads to a mathematical description of the shape, which then leads to the mathematical problem that needs solving.



(Longhorn Skull, Opus 713)

For my natural-world subjects, I often use a step-by-step geometric technique I developed called polygon packing. To design a shape, we represent each part of the subject—an arm, leg, wing, and so forth—by a polygonal region of paper, and then we find a method for packing all of those polygons into the square of the origami paper. The packing needs to satisfy certain rules. Some are obvious—the head polygon is connected to the neck polygon, and so forth. Others are a bit more obscure. Once we have a packing, there's a straightforward way of drawing crease lines on it that gives a

complete crease pattern that will fold into the desired shape.

Sometimes, though, I just fall back on experience. For many subjects, I know instinctively how to ensure there's enough paper in the right place for all the parts, so I can just start folding. That's more or less the approach I used for the ampersand, using the chain of reasoning outlined above.



(Chrysina Beetle, Opus 717)

What would be your dream origami project, if time and resources were no object?

I've long been fascinated by insects and other arthropods, and have folded many over the years in varying styles. I've often thought about doing a series of representatives from the major interesting arthropod families in a single style: which could be a hundred or more (depending on where the cut-off line for "interesting" is — there are twenty-four orders of just insects to consider!). Since a single complex insect might take a week of designing and folding, it's unlikely that I'd ever truly complete such a project, but it would be a great one to take on.

Where can readers learn more about your work?

My website at langorigami.com. There are about four hundred photos of my artwork on the site, some of which you can see in this article.

There's also a list of articles that [tell you a little more about me](#), discuss where you [can see my artwork in real life](#), talk about the software I've written for origami, and much more.



Inspired by this month's origami cover, we also reached out to [Charlie N. Holmberg](#), author of the Paper Magician fantasy series.

[For those who might not know your books, how would you introduce the Paper Magician series?](#)

Charlie Holmberg: [The Paper Magician](#) series is a historical fantasy that takes place in an alternative-history London, England, at the beginning of the Edwardian period. It revolves around the idea of people being able to cast spells through manufactured materials such as paper, rubber, and glass. Ceony Twill is a recent graduate from a rigorous magic prep school, but due to a shortage of Folders (paper magicians), she's forced to study paper-based magic, which is seen as the least prestigious of magical disciplines. Not long after she begins her apprenticeship, a strange woman barges into her mentor's home and literally rips his heart from his chest. Ceony makes him a paper replacement, then has to retrieve the real heart before the replacement fails.

[How did you go about developing the system of material-based magic used in the books?](#)

I always thought it would be neat to animate origami. I loved origami as a kid (though my own skills are limited), and I thought that would be a great base for a magic system. I wanted to go broader, however, so I started to brainstorm what else could go along with paper. Well,

paper is a man-made product, so I ended up taking that route. The catch is that human beings are *also* man-made, and so the magic system includes blood- and flesh-based spells, too.

Ceony Twill, your student heroine, initially doesn't appreciate the value or glory of working with paper as her specialty. What specialty would you yourself prefer—paper as well, as an author?

I admit my heart is split on this one. Realistically, yes, I'd go the paper route. Paper is easy to manipulate, and in the books, I put a lot of whimsy into its spells. But I also think it'd be rad to be a fire magician. Fewer spells, but hello, I could throw fire!

Regardless of materials, what effects would you create or what creations would you bring to life?

A lot of the things I'd love to bring to life have been incorporated into the books! Definitely giant paper airplanes, or being able to transport through mirrors. The ability to mask one's appearance would open up a whole world of possibilities.

But really? I'd make a bunch of automated servants to help me around the house! And maybe have a visual solar system in my backyard.

Regardless of actual magic, would you consider yourself crafty in real life? We understand that you've already used some paper skills in *Magic: The Gathering*; what's the story there?

I have limited crafting abilities. Every now and then, the bug bites, but I'm not nearly as crafty as my Pinterest boards make me look. Usually the holiday season kicks me into gear—I've made teacup candles and Scrabble word-art as gifts before, as well as ripped the pages out of books to make purses from their hardcovers. The rest of the year, I'm pretty dull.

And yes! My husband and I both play *Magic: The Gathering*, and for our anniversary a couple of years ago, I created a deck of personalized cards for him. These include the Late Night Political Rant sorcery that lets you draw and then discard a card, the instant True Love that prevents all damage dealt, and the creature to kill all creatures, Fussy Baby . . . which is a 4/1 with double strike. Everything, of course, is powered by love mana.

We've also seen the news of the *Paper Magician* books being picked

up by Disney—so congratulations! Are there other projects you're working on that you'd like to mention, with your own writing, your work with the *Deep Magic e-zine*, or otherwise?

Thank you so much! I'm very excited about the prospect of Disney taking on the story.

I always have projects going (I have no other hobbies other than occasional gift-inspired crafts). I just turned in a novel titled *The Fifth Doll* to my editor, which features a magic system using Russian matryoshka dolls. I'm doing final edits for a book that takes place in Utah during the California Gold Rush, and I'm currently burning through my first attempt at contemporary fantasy (that one mixes magic with high-school wrestling, one of my favorite sports).

The *Deep Magic e-zine* has been incredibly fun to work with, and we have a slew of great stories coming out in our December and February issues, including a tale from Michael J. Sullivan. For me, each issue is like a box of science fiction and fantasy chocolates. Definitely worth the read!

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS



Concepting the Creatures

Learn what it takes to create the art for *Volo's Guide to Monsters*!

The D&D game has new lore for existing monsters, new options for playing monstrous races, and over one hundred new monsters to populate your campaigns— *Volo's Guide to Monsters* has now hit store shelves!

Hopefully, you've been able to pick up a copy for yourself; or if not, you can check out the table of contents posted on the book's [product page](#). Either way, now that you know what's inside *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, we wanted to explore the process of making the book.

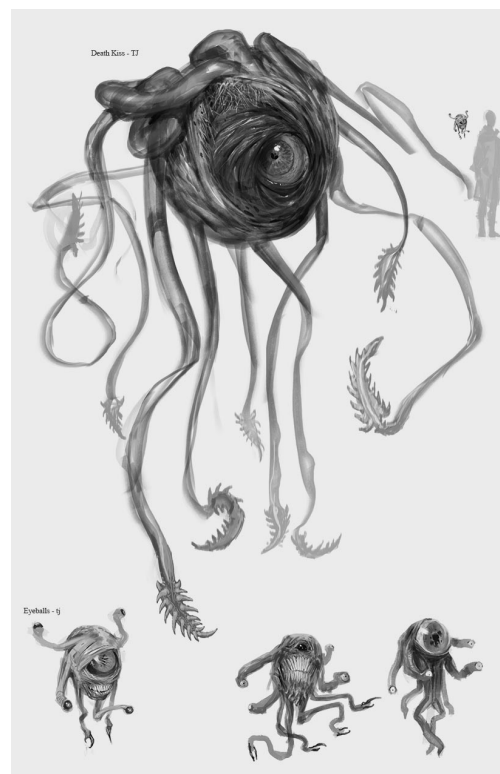
First, senior art director Richard Whitters sat down to discuss the concepting process behind several of the book's most fearsome creatures. Those creatures are illustrated below with the corresponding concept art—much of which Richard helped create himself.

Death Kiss

Artist: Tyler Jacobson

Tyler's work should be familiar to all D&D players, as he created the cover art for the *Player's Handbook* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (among many other pieces, all of which he's discussed on the [Dragon Talk podcast](#)).

The beholder features a number of key characteristics in its central eye, its ravenous maw, and its eyestalks. But beyond that, the creature can be reskinned in various ways while still being recognizable as a beholder—you might imagine versions with stony skin, fish scales, or even dragon scales. Here, Tyler was tasked with taking a more realistic take on the death kiss. This version of the beholder originally appeared back in the second edition *Monstrous Manual*, and featured monstrous tentacles. You can see the bottom tentacle overpainted to give feedback on making them even toothier.



(Select to view)

Mind Flayer



(Select to view)

Artist: Tyler Jacobson

As with beholders, mind flayers are easily recognizable with their squid-like heads. As an iconic creature, they have a template that's hard to break, so Tyler's challenge was to push their design even further. The results came in first with a disconcertingly thin physique (almost Slender Man-esque). The second attempt featured a more organic approach to armor, explored here in the form of a weird, oily carapace. The third design, as seen at the bottom, implements cuttlefish as well as squid into the design—showing how psionic input or output might have expressive physiological effects. And while such details might not come across in static illustrations, they are useful in other contexts.

Quickling

Artist: Richard Whitters

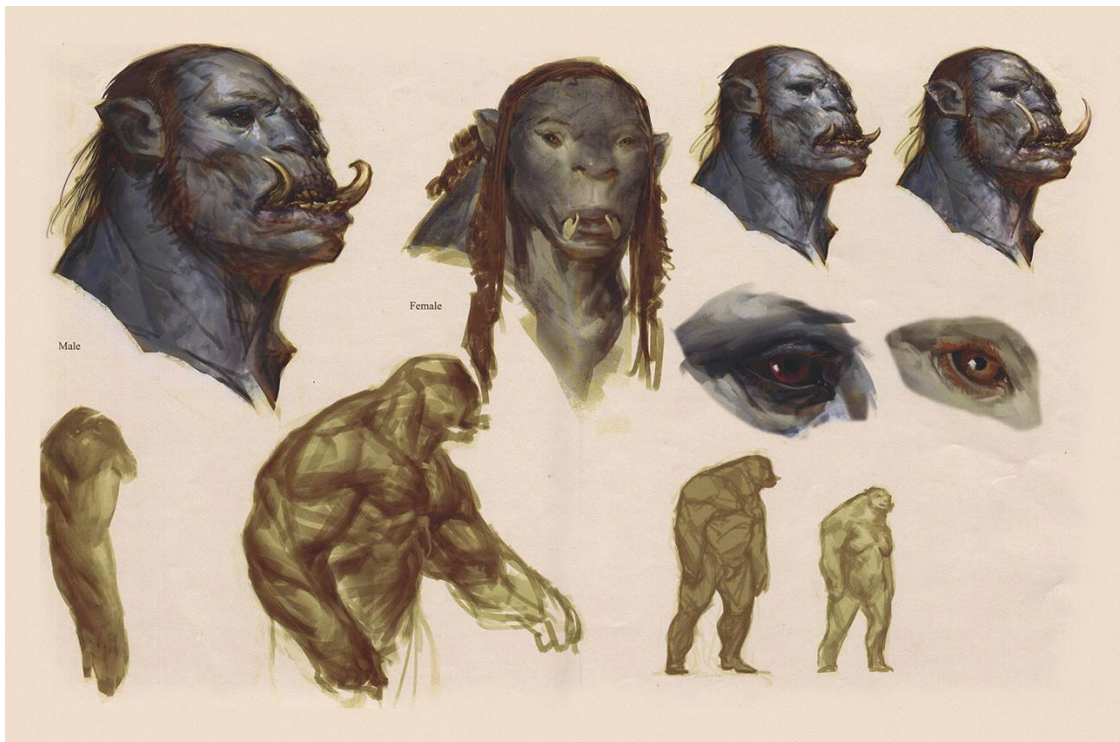
With the beholder and mind flayer, the aim was to push their design. However, this version of the quickling proves that sometimes design can be pushed

too far—in this case, outside of the quickling’s fey palette and too much into goblin. That said, certain ideas were retained, such as the lightning touches.



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Orcs



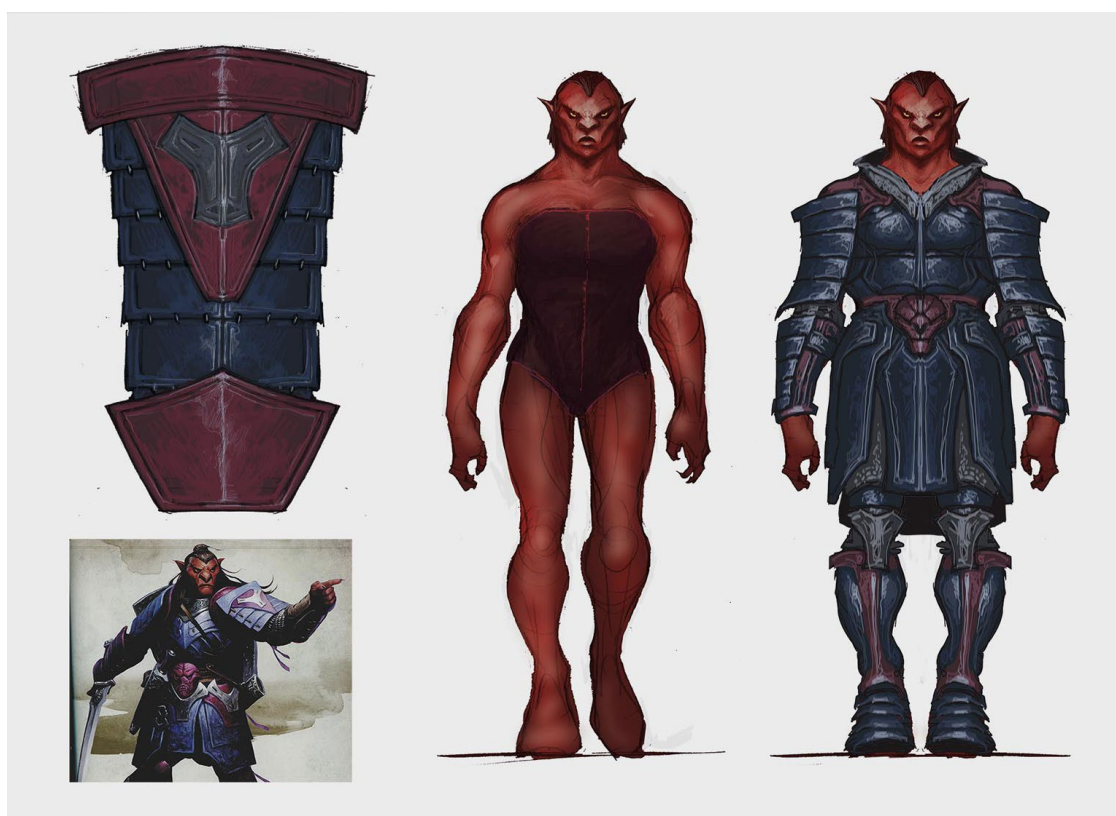
(Select to view)

Artist: Tyler Jacobson

Orcs and elves come with unique sets of challenges as transition races. Design-wise, they usually appear in ways that allow them to be dialed back to create half-orcs and half-elves. Here, though, orcs

were taken the other way, moving further into the monstrous with exaggerated tusks and burly physiques.

Hobgoblin

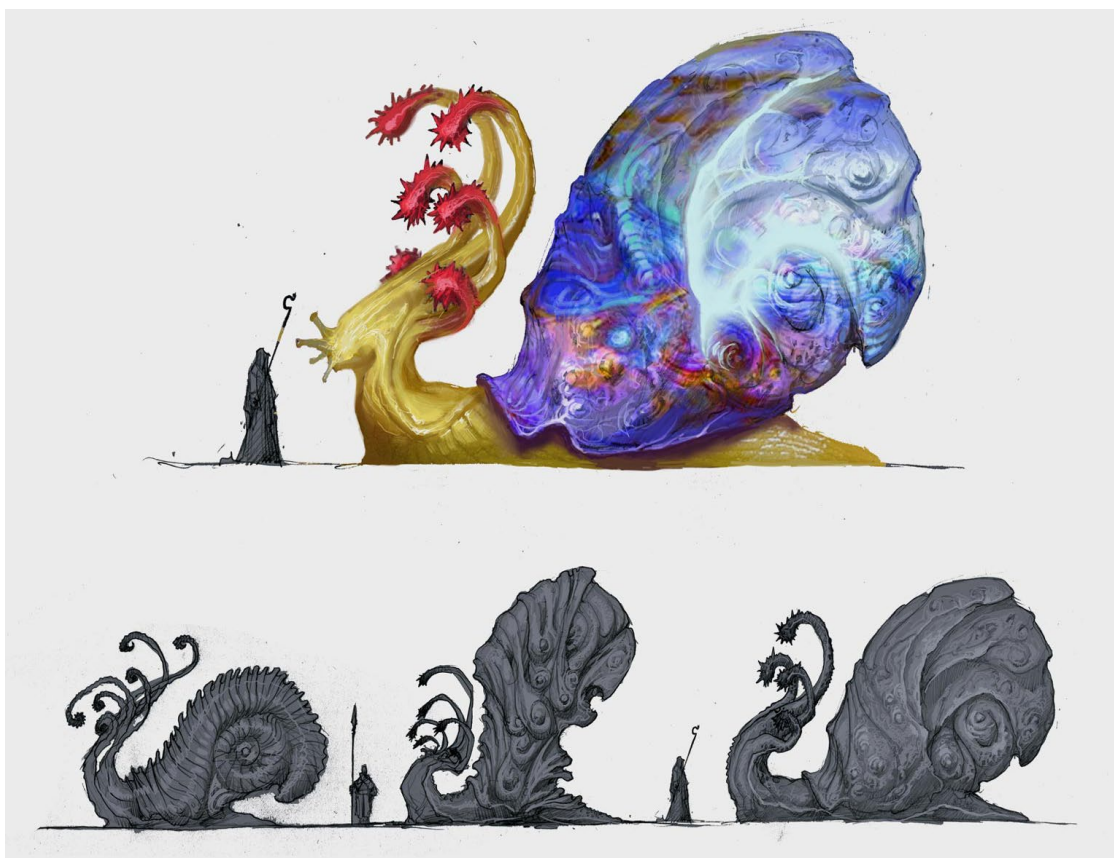


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Artist: Richard Whitters (original version from Steve Prescott)

Based on the fifth edition base creature (shown in the lower corner), the goal was to present a female version and achieve better gender representation. Unarmored and armored depictions are both shown in order to more fully depict body type, along with armaments in the same palette.

Flail Snail



(Select to view)

Artist: Richard Whitters

The original flail snail appeared in the first edition *Fiend Folio* in black and white, along with a description of having a highly colored shell (acting, in fact, as a *robe of scintillating colors*). The challenge came in remaining faithful to this description while still experimenting with the creature—such as in the bottom sketches, playing with shapes and tones. The middle snail appears to have fallen asleep and had its pearlescent shell carved into a work of statuary by underground denizens.

Kobold



(Select to view)

Artist: Richard Whitters

These junked-up kobolds showcase how they're clever enough to steal and repurpose what they need after raiding a kitchen—but still not *that* clever.

Kobold Dragonshield



(Select to view)

Artist: Richard Whitters

Todd Lockwood's dragons have been executed so well that their designs have persisted across multiple editions of the D&D game. (Designed from the bones up, his dragons reference cat skeletons.) Here, the kobold variety is shown, marrying together kobolds and black dragons.

Ki-rin



(Select to view)

Artist: Richard Whitters

Richard has talked about how much he enjoys drawing “wacko” shapes, especially as applied to magical creatures, in order to give them more of a magical effect. The ki-rin is equine, but is designed to read more oddly. Its hooves, for example, are pointy and curved to make it feel more like a creature of the air, versus the flattened hooves of a land-based creature walking on solid ground.

Yuan-ti Broodguard



(Select to view)

Artist: Richard Whitters

In past editions, the broodguard appeared as a more shapeless mutant (shown left). The desire for this version was for more of a defined shape, though still hunched and walking awkwardly, as befitting a creature crudely advanced from snakes.

Hags

Artist: Tom Babbey

Tom might be relatively new to D&D art, but he's a huge fan of the brand. Assigned a few concepts to tackle in *Volo's Guide*, he came up with some awesome work. His hags feature incredible thoughtfulness in their detail, such as building nests in their hair and wearing bells to terrify adventurers who hear them drawing near.

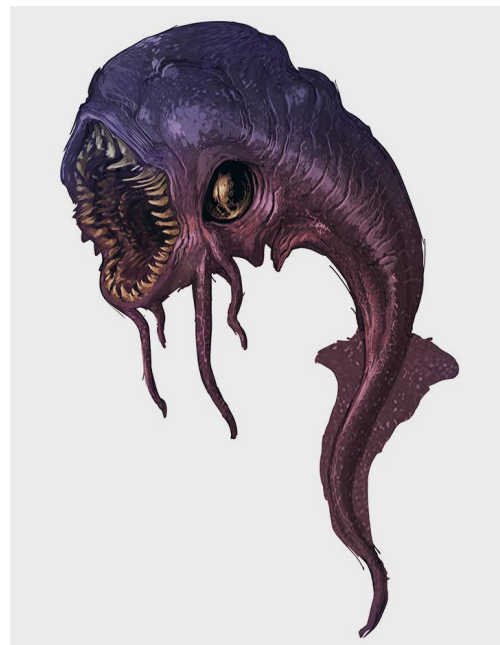


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Tadpole

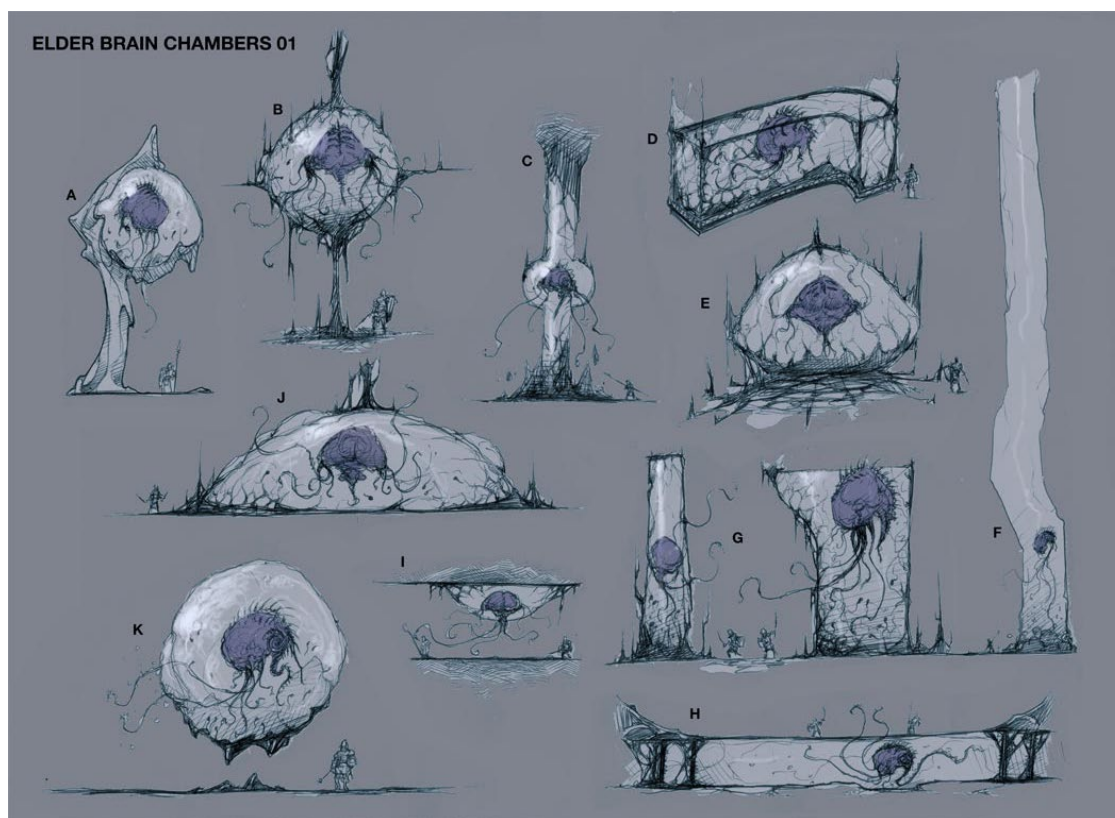
Artist: Richard Whitters

Mind flayers appeared in the *Monster Manual*, but *Volo's Guide* covers more of their life cycle. Here, a mind flayer tadpole is shown as an intrusive, face-hugger type of monster, given a lamprey-like maw and hints of mind flayer tentacles.



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Elder Brain Chambers



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Artist: Richard Whitters

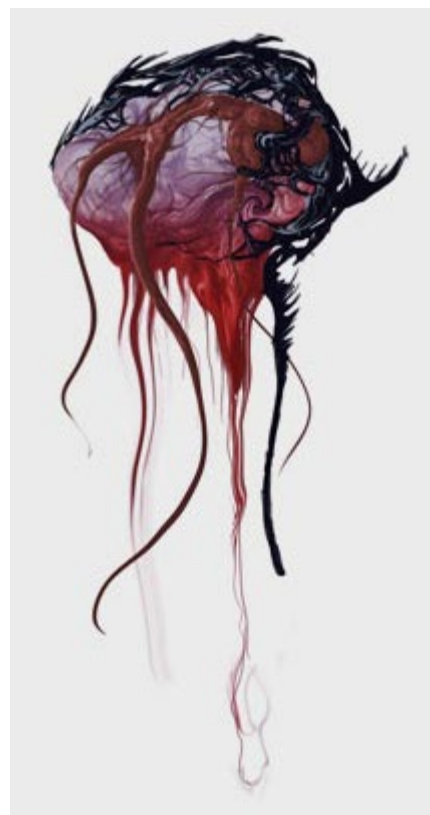
A study of elder brain chambers was made for a digital partner

looking to place an elder brain in their game. The experiment was to show an elder brain as not so much a vulnerable, levitating psionic soufflé, but to demonstrate how it might move in a liquid environment and exhibit a sense of threat, clearly able to still lash out and attack. (Richard swears he was paying attention in the non-*Volo's Guide*-related meeting where he made these sketches!)

Elder Brain

Artist: Richard Whitters

Some of the mind flayer concepting from Tyler Jacobson carried over to the elder brains, including their black, oily carapaces. Richard also played around with the idea of a black spiny tentacle that might have once been the staff of a powerful mind flayer—setting up that the mind flayer used that staff to gouge out its own brain to grow itself into a new elder brain. A truly vile and horrifying act, and something only a mind flayer would do!



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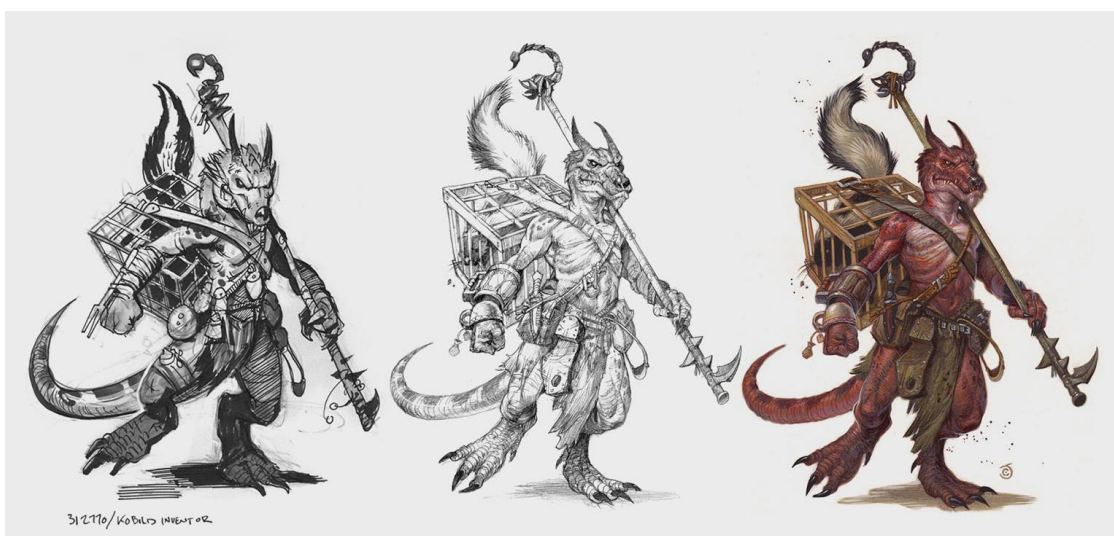
Next, Senior Art Director Kate Irwin offered a look at the art descriptions that go out to various artists. At times, these are detailed descriptions, such as the ones that helped shape the kobolds of *Volo's Guide to Monsters*.

As Kate notes: During concept, we explore ideas that sometimes are brought to fruit and sometimes die on the vine. This happens for a variety of reasons, whether certain ideas don't hold up to lore or don't fit a direction we've already decided upon, or if content was removed from the book. That said, it's almost never because the ideas lack coolness. In fact, sometimes the final work that comes from the

concepting push inspires new content or direction for other projects.

For the kobold, we decided to stay the course with the fifth edition design. I think we were able to bring depth to the kobolds, and I love the way Cory Trego-Erdner brought intensity and fierceness to the final kobold dragonshield (as shown in final book) even with the mismatched armor and little puppy nose. With the quickling, Richard Whitters wasn't entirely satisfied with his concept version; he wanted to make it look more mischievous, refined, and downright faster with his final art.

Kobold Inventor



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Artist: Chris Seaman

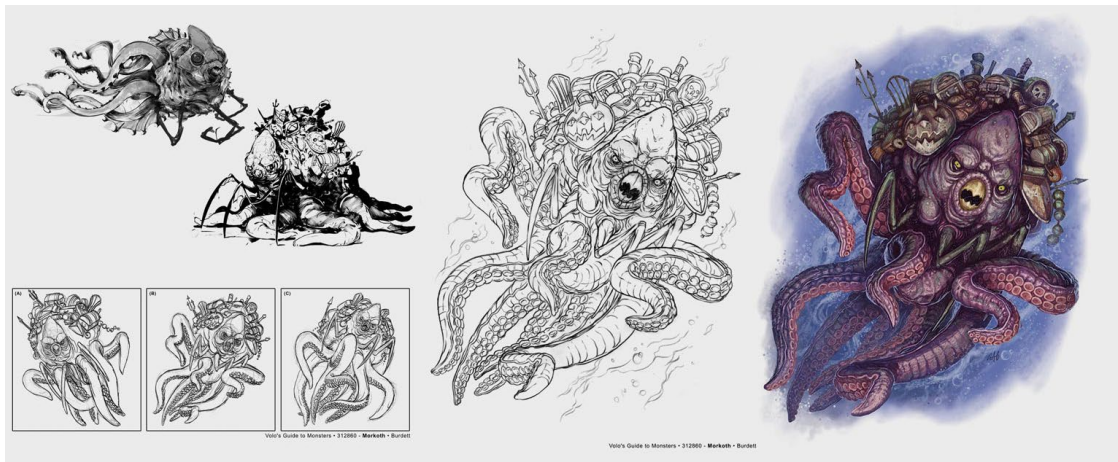
Show a KOBOLD (3 feet tall) wearing a leather loincloth, belt, and harness. A sling hangs from the belt, along with a few stuffed pouches and sealed gourds. His leather harness is attached to a wicker cage on his back. The cage contains a live skunk.

The kobold clutches a wooden pole with a live SCORPION tied to the end of it.

The kobold should look determined and a little crazy.

Some descriptions are more straightforward, such as the morkoth concepted by Shawn Wood:

Morkoth

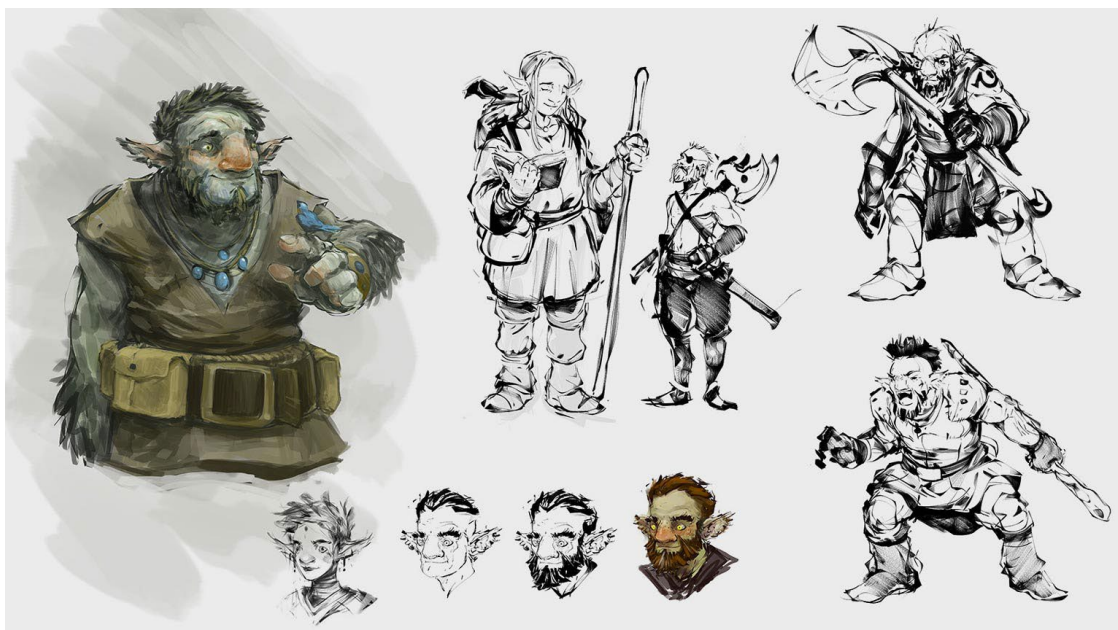


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Artist: Christopher Burdett

Show us a MORKOTH, an abhorrent creature of the deepest ocean. It's about 8 feet tall, with piscine features and the lower body of an octopus.

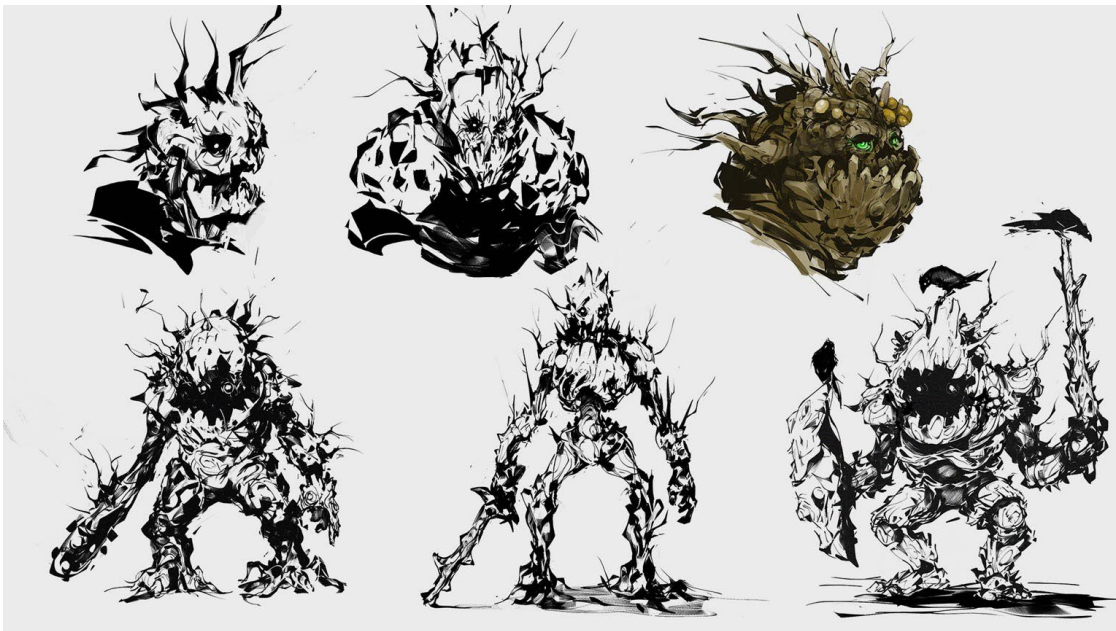
In addition, the following concepting (all by Shawn Wood) showcases the firbolg, tabaxi, and wood woad.



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We hope you've enjoyed this look inside *Volo's Guide to Monsters*. As we continue to preview and promote the latest offerings for Dungeons & Dragons, we plan on showcasing further behind-the-scenes material, including concept sketches and art. If there are ever items or elements of the game that you're curious about, please **let us know!**

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What's in Your Bag?

Your responses to our community question: What strange things might be found in a giant's bag?

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The D&D Community

Giants often carry around both treasure and mundane items, so as adventurers plunder their hoards, it's always a mystery what strange things might be found in a giant's bag. Storm King's Thunder provided a useful table noting more than fifty such items and objects, but we wanted to expand that list, so we asked for your help .

In 150 words or less, you let us know what unusual, unexpected, or otherwise unique items characters might come across when delving into a giant's bag. So the next time your adventurers are looking through a giant's loot (or in any scenario where odd random items are called for), the DM can include items chosen or rolled randomly from the following table.

Our sincere thanks to all the contributors—and we look forward to your creativity in our next community poll!

More Items in a Giant's Bag

1.
An angry groundhog.
2.
A spool of greasy, fouled rope used as dental floss.
3.
A set of nesting dolls in the image of giants, carved of wood (hill), obsidian (stone), ivory (frost), steel (fire), silver (cloud), or coral (storm).
4.
A tattered old teddy bear with buttons for eyes. Roughly sewn closed, it softly crackles when handled, and contains a collection of notes listing things its giant owner feared.
5.
A medusa's head. At least, you think it is, though you haven't been petrified after looking into its lovely, vacant eyes. Perhaps it just needs a little spit and polish, or maybe it needs to be reanimated somehow.
6.
A magical false beard. When attached to a creature's face, it takes on the appearance of real hair (and makes any existing beard twice as long).
7.
A well-carved statuette, depicting the likeness of one of the party members.
8.
A novel written in Giant about a steamy love affair between a fire giant and a frost giant.
9.
A tin of chocolate-covered rot grubs.

10.

A charm bracelet made of farming implements.

11.

A foul-smelling ancient spear that has been used as a toothpick.

12.

A torn chain shirt used for scouring dirty dishes.

13.

A giant eagle leg, lightly salted and smoked.

14.

A mummified dead rat that comes alive every full moon and does nothing but follow its owner around.

15.

A brass whistle that can be heard only by rocs, and was likely used to train them for battle.

16.

A group of 2d8 interlocking blocks, each the size of a human fist, used by playful giants to build imaginative structures. As an action, the blocks can be scattered on the ground to create difficult terrain in a 5-foot area.

17.

Twelve pairs of halfling-sized shoes.

18.

A humanoid ribcage and a small mallet used to play it like a xylophone.

19.

An enormous mason jar filled with 2d6 giant fire beetles.

20.

A harness that allows a giant to carry one or more small folk on its back.

21.

A cow, sheep, pig, or goose, dressed and spiced for cooking.

22.

A tapestry bearing a beautiful depiction of a unicorn drinking at a fountain, rendered in gold and silver thread—and used by a giant as a handkerchief.

23.

An autographed portrait of Jim Darkmagic. When any pack, bag, or other container holding the picture is opened, three doves fly out of the container, then quickly disappear.

24.

A giant-sized set of thieves' tools.

25.

A length of thick chain engraved with intricate runes that occasionally spark with lightning.

26.

A walrus tusk intricately carved with scrimshaw depictions of a frost giant's exploits.

27.

A live duck that will faithfully follow any character who rescues it.

28.

A giant's cosmetics case, featuring mosses, ochres, charcoal, and unspeakable pastes. The contents can be used as an herbalist's kit or a poisoner's kit.

29.

A roc-feather quill that trails beautiful sparkles when used to write.

30.

Humanoid-sized chess pieces that are actually living creatures turned to stone.

31.

A glowing white wooden crown, whose light becomes brighter as the moon becomes full.

32.

The sign from a tavern called the Jilted Bear.

33.

A huge jar with holes punched in the lid, containing either a reindeer,

a pony, a black dragon wyrmling, or a humanoid commoner.

34.

An incomplete air glider made from the bones and leather of dragons' wings.

35.

A lifelike stone sculpture of a female dwarf's head with a roughly broken base, wrapped in a sack. The head wears a stern look and a scratched, lopsided horned helmet missing one horn. When carried underground, the sculpture assumes a smile and whispers quietly in Dwarvish.

36.

The skeleton of a small bird that laughs loudly whenever its owner makes a horrible joke or pun.

A severed and partly mummified human head, wearing an adamantine diadem that identifies it as a cleric of Selûne.

37.

A set of dice shaped from humanoid skulls—a halfling d4, a gnome d6, an elf d8, a human d10, and a half-orc d12.

38.

A jar of pickled goblin heads.

39.

A massive cheese wheel with a large bite taken out of it.

40.

A rock that creates the image of a small rainbow when thrown against any hard surface.

41.

A half-completed scrimshaw carved in the likeness of a remorhaz, made from a humanoid spinal column.

42.

A dead fish that somehow never rots, and which sings sea shanties when placed underwater.

43.

A polished lump of amber the size of a humanoid head, with

thousands of insects suspended inside.

44.

A huge glass bottle containing a model sailboat, which is seaworthy and can carry one Medium creature.

45.

A large sheaf of parchment, each page of which is inscribed with a Dwarvish rune and a depiction of an object that starts with that letter in the Giant language.

46.

A squeaky toy in the shape of an angry-looking hamster, which moves to a different pocket or bag in your possession every time you look for it.

47.

A small humanoid skeleton, gilded and jeweled in a runed metallic cage.

48.

A mummified goblin corpse in a fetal position, which clutches a small key to an unknown lock.

49.

A necklace of huge baby teeth carved with the symbols of giant gods.

50.

A painting of a female elf against a coastal landscape. A distinctive blue ring is visible on her finger as she points at something.

51.

A huge, rusty clockwork gear inscribed with an arcane symbol.

52.

The mummified corpse of a bard, bound by light chains to a number of ruined instruments.

53.

An engagement ring fashioned out of a bent longsword, decorated with shiny chains and trinkets strung around it.

54.

A massive egg of unknown origin, protected by hay wrapped up in

fine linens.

55.

A cage containing dozens of live owls.

56.

The dried tentacle of a mind flayer, which maintains a semblance of life and writhes in the presence of psionic power.

57.

The bare skull of a juvenile white dragon, with a pitchfork jammed into the base to create a large drinking vessel.

58.

A board game whose pieces are booty the giant has picked up on its travels.

59.

A desiccated halfling's foot, with "For Luck" carved into it in Giant.

60.

An origami figure that resembles a different animal each time it is taken out of a bag or pack.

61.

A churn full of fresh butter.

62.

A large pot with its lid tied on with rope, and which contains a questionable stew.

63.

A magically intelligent door that yearns to be attached to the doorway of an important room.

64.

A rune-engraved scroll case holding a length of charcoal and a vellum scroll, which is covered in sketches of a giant family engaged in domestic activities. The final image is only half finished, and features a giant child strapping on a set of armor several sizes too large.

65.

A small vial of sentient smoke that can communicate by changing

color.

66.

A stone-carved compass that always points to the nearest, most recent landslide or avalanche.

67.

A stone tablet, possibly broken off from a statue. The words “In honor of the brave warriors who courageously defended our home from the wrath of the giants!” are engraved on the tablet in three languages.

68.

A collection of badges and cloak clasps kept in a threadbare coin purse.

69.

A clear glass jar with a clay lid marked by an unfamiliar rune. A small storm cloud appears to swirl within the jar, spitting sparks of lightning toward the glass if the jar is held.

70.

A crude sewing kit, containing a spool of thick rope, a giant-sized silver needle, and a silver thimble that could fit the head of a Medium humanoid. An experienced smith can fashion the needle and thimble into a silver rapier and a matching dimpled helm.

71.

An especially small kobold with a book of lullabies and a megaphone.

72.

A gem-studded humanoid-sized necklace used as a giant’s ring.

73.

Two strands of snow-white hair sealed in a gem-cut chunk of glass.

74.

Two live goats, only one of which is grateful for the rescue.

75.

A goblet that changes the color of any liquid poured into it.

76.

1d6 chickens, 1d4 pigs, 1d8 bales of straw, and a battered scarecrow.

77.

1d100 horseshoes.

78.

Several sketches that show all the party members but contain no written information.

79.

A divining rod made of a forked tree trunk so large that it requires two humanoids to carry it. Its ends have been dipped in molten gold and its surface is carved with images of giants hunting mastodons. It can be used to point toward the largest beast, monstrosity, or dragon within fifty miles.

80.

A dagger carved out of a single piece of a strange translucent and glimmering material. A portion of the blade has been broken off. Holding the item causes the wielder to feel a deep longing to be reunited with a person dear to them.

81.

A spyglass sized for a giant, which could act as a powerful telescope for smaller creatures.

82.

A small crystal globe containing a miniaturized landscape. When the globe is shaken, the landscape within it shows changing weather that accurately predicts the local weather of the following day.

83.

A King Hekaton action figure, with moveable parts.

84.

A sculpture of an illithid carved out of ambergris.

85.

A gnome that has been secretly living inside the bag, sneaking out at night to steal food and relieve itself, then sneaking back in before the giant wakes up.

86.

An aarakocra in a large cage. If freed, the aarakocra can become a loyal companion to the adventurers.

87.

An unbreakable wooden candle that never burns down.

88.

A deck of playing cards, in which the face cards all incorporate the image of the deck's current owner.

89.

A small boulder with veins of a precious metal running through it.

90.

A bottle filled with hot pepper sauce concocted and brewed by fire giants.

91.

A tree stump half-whittled into the form of a cat.

92.

The shrunken head of a goblin king named Krogg. If asked a question, the head opens its eyes, identifies itself, and then spits colorful insults at the party.

93.

A giant-sized teddy-owlbear.

94.

A petrified fish skeleton that produces a pleasant-tasting soup broth each time it is placed in hot water.

95.

A clean, giant-sized sock that makes an incredibly comfortable bedroll for a smaller creature.

96.

An arrow that sheds bright light as a torch when set to a bow and nocked.

97.

A wooden spoon whose handle is carved to resemble a crescent moon. The spoon perfectly spices any food stirred with it.

98.

A finely crafted clockwork chicken.

99.

Half of an elven ribcage used as a giant's comb, and tangled with clumps and strands of coarse hair.

100.

One set of thieves' tools or two daggers can be hidden within the beard. If the beard is ever cut, the wearer must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or fall into a short-term depression.

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Expanding the Underdark

Gale Force Nine provides an exclusive look at the new expansion for *Tyrants of the Underdark*

Tyrants of the Underdark is Gale Force Nine's board game of conquest, deception, and intense rivalry, which mixes deck-building card mechanics with deep board-game strategy. Cast as the head of one of four great drow houses, it's your task to enthrall the Underdark, bending its eerie denizens to your will as you seek to rule this sinister realm. Power and influence are your key currencies, as is controlling important cities like Menzoberranzan and Blingdenstone, but *Tyrants* also incorporates a huge variety of play styles. Will you prosper as a devious spymaster infiltrating your enemies' strongholds? Or will you take on the role of a battle-hungry warlord, putting your opponents to the sword?

Designed by the team of Peter Lee, Rodney Thompson, and Andrew Veen—who were responsible for the renowned



Lords of Waterdeep — *Tyrants of the Underdark* was released this past June. Gale Force Nine’s John-Paul Brisigotti has been on tour with it ever since, taking it to all

the major game shows, where it has been greeted with acclaim. With the game set to expand with new aberration and undead decks available before the holidays, *Dragon+* caught up with Brisigotti to learn more about his future tyrannical plans.

Even if you’ve never ventured into the depths of the Underdark before, it’s easy to see why *Tyrants* has such an immediate appeal, but Brisigotti reveals that one of the board game’s core strengths is its sense of suspense. “Like the drow, you keep your secrets close and subtle, and only reveal your true strength at the end. It’s a game that has a close finish every time. There’s no way to really know during play who truly has the upper hand.” Although the core concept is simple—“Conquer all”—the four half-card decks you’re dealt give you a wealth of forces and tactics to master. However, play can be swift and brutal. “With games running at just over an hour,” Brisigotti notes, “you’ll soon have a chance for revenge. Sometimes several times in a single games night.”

With each drow house pursuing the same goals, it doesn’t take long for the first acts of aggression to materialize, and by the end of the game, all the players will have tasted blood. “There’s no second place in drow society,” says Brisigotti, “and the Influence and



(Select to view)

Power game mechanics are your weapons of choice. Influence is how you recruit forces to your cause, while Power is the ability to deploy your forces on the board and assassinate rival units.” Cunning deck building gives you access to drow, dragon, demon, and elemental forces, and is also how you control key locations on the board. “Areas of the Underdark are worth different values, and the major

cities are worth points and influence both during the game and at the end. Planning your strategy—from the placement of your house at the start, to which tunnels and locations you control— is an ever-evolving tactic, especially once other players get in your way.”



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Even though it might seem like an obvious choice for such a game setting, what first drew Gale Force Nine to the realm of the drow? Why does it have such a unique and enduring appeal as a setting? “The Underdark is quite simply the most challenging realm,” says Brisigotti. “Death awaits you in every tunnel. It’s never a matter of *if*, but *when* your end will come.” But beyond the D series of classic adventure modules that first introduced the drow to an unsuspecting world, Brisigotti also focuses on the influence of an unlikely drow hero with dual scimitars and a black cat. “The Drizzt books brought the Underdark to life in a way that only great stories can. We got to learn about its denizens, society, and key characters as



we followed Drizzt’s story. We have a much deeper understanding of the Underdark thanks to R.A. Salvatore’s books.”



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Taking *Tyrants of the Underdark* on the road and showing it to the public has also been instructive, and Brisigotti admits that he’s learned a thing or two from playing the game with some of its many fans. “Even with my knowledge and plenty of practice, I can still get my butt kicked! Because every game is so close, you have to fight for every point you can.” Demoing *Tyrants* at the Origins Game Fair also produced some surprising results. “Given how scoring works and the myriad of ways to add a point here or there, I’ve always assumed that tied games would be extremely unlikely. So I was elated to have not one but two groups prove me completely wrong. You have to remind yourself that even with years of development and half a year to playtest and polish, the only real test of a game is when gamers actually get hold of it.”



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For those thinking of taking up the challenge, Brisigotti’s advice on winning strategies and tactics is simple: “Let your inner draw come out.” But with the aberration and undead expansion on the horizon, players’ options for domination and mayhem are set to grow exponentially.

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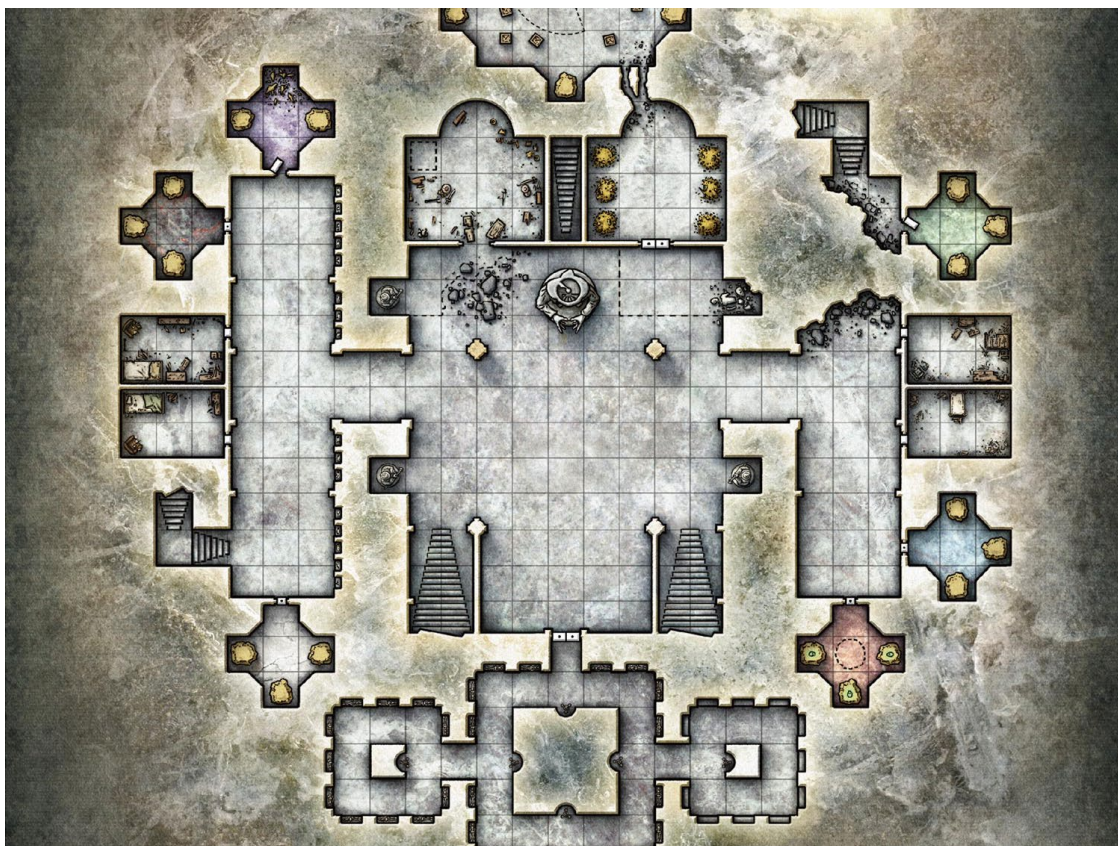


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Dungeon Mapping

Mapmaker supreme Mike Schley discusses the joy of cartography

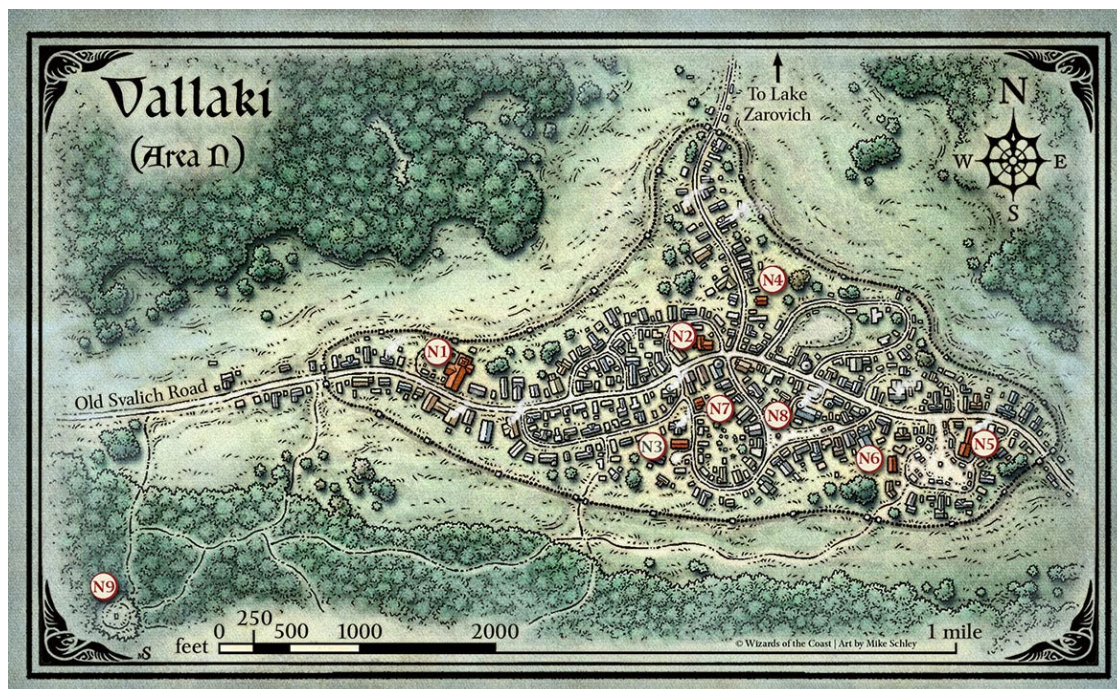
Powerful wizards, heroic fighters, and furtive rogues are the staples of most fantasy illustrators' portfolios. But artist Mike Schley's slightly different—though no less evocative—specialty is cartography and mapmaking, bringing dungeons, cities, and whole realms to life through his beautiful and highly detailed drawings.

Schley began studying art back in grade school, and has worked a number of jobs including muralist, digital photo editor, graphic designer, and art director. But for the past decade, his full-time focus has been on cartography and fantasy illustration. He's created



many of D&D’s most memorable maps, from the detailed streets of Neverwinter and Menzoberranzan, to numerous areas of the Forgotten Realms, as well as many maps from the recent *Storm King’s Thunder* storyline.

We talked to Mike about his art, his process, and his years-long involvement in mapping the worlds of Dungeons & Dragons.



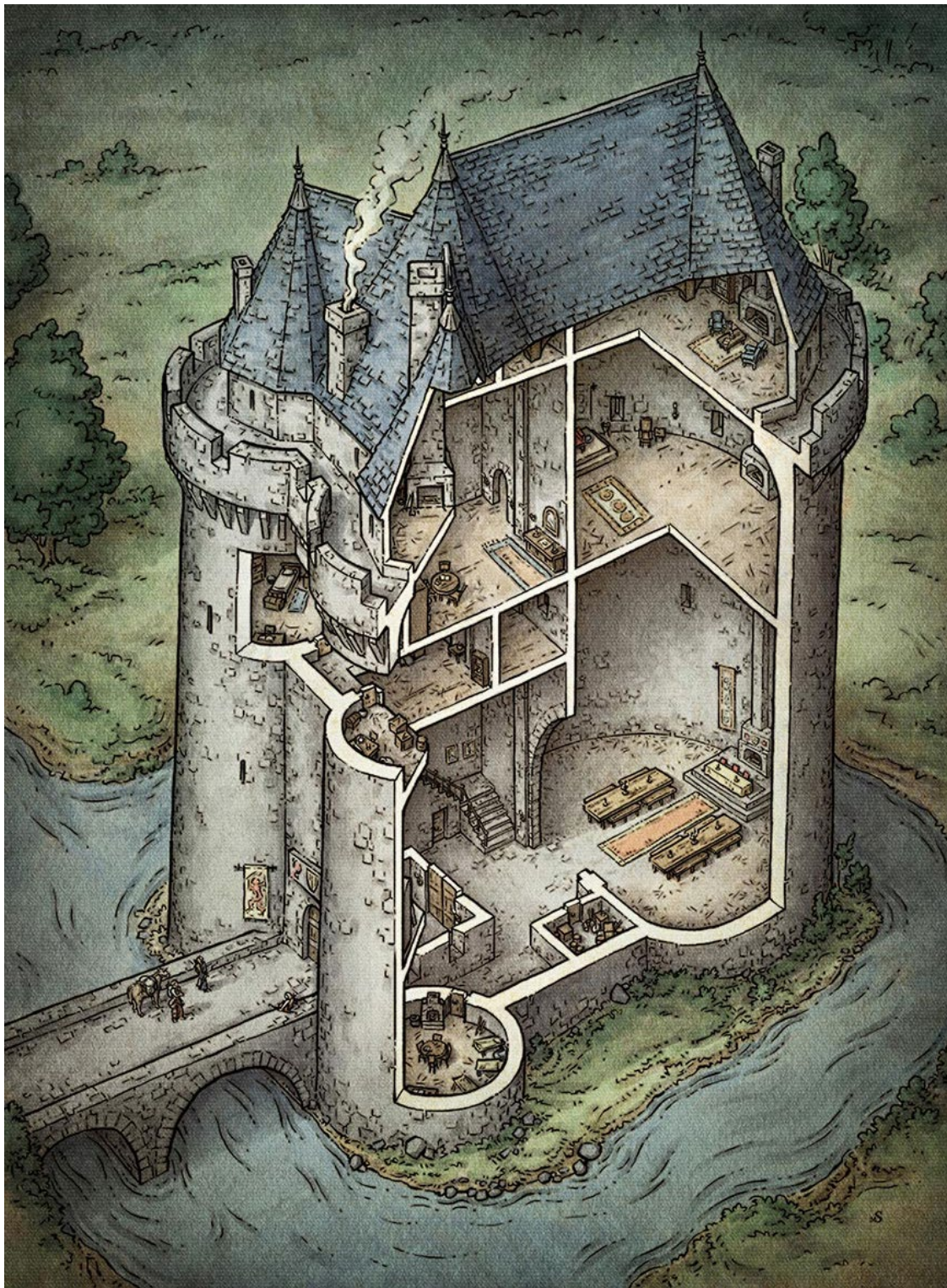
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What kinds of characters and campaigns do you enjoy?
 I usually play a cleric, typically of the undead-smashing “Hammer of Pelor” sort. Healing is great and all, but it’s unneeded if you dispense the light of justice before the enemy knows what hit them. Campaign arcs involving an insidious creeping doom and the need for good to stand in the face of seemingly insurmountable evil are par for the

course.

How did you first come to specialize in fantasy cartography and map creation?

Years ago, I was working as the associate art director for *Dungeon* magazine. One of the struggles I constantly came up against was finding artists with the chops to do great work and a desire to produce a ton of maps in an extremely short turnaround time. Folks like Christopher West, Robert Lazzaretti, and Kyle Hunter were few and far between back then.



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One month, all of my regular artists were unavailable or already working on projects for me. So I decided to crank out a set of maps myself, since our press deadline was fast approaching. Well, I fell in love with mapmaking all over again, and was transported back to my childhood when I'd spend hours on end drawing dungeon plans, fictional *Risk* game boards, or tactical layouts of my neighborhood

for homebrew wargames. Within a year, I had decided to get back to doing what I loved, which was making fantasy art and maps instead of just assigning them, and I've been doing it full-time ever since.

Would you say cartography is a very different process from creating other fantasy art?

I believe that although the two rely on similar skills and formal considerations like the use of color, composition, and space, there are distinct differences in approach, since they're intended to solve different problems. Cartography is more of a balance between form and function than cover or interior art usually is.

Since this is a D&DIY issue, do you have any tips for budding mapmakers?

There are three primary concerns that need equal attention in making a successful map. First and foremost, it must provide information that people require for it to be useful. Secondly, the imagery and design must be readable and not cluttered. Finally, the artwork should excite the reader's imagination and give identity to the setting the map represents. You're building a world with each map, so make it a world your audience will want to explore.

What were your inspirations when you began to make the maps for Storm King's Thunder?

My main sources of inspiration come from literature and historical cartography. In particular, I remember collecting nautical charts as a kid, along with numerous foldout maps pulled from the pages of every *National Geographic* I could get my hands on. My bedroom walls were practically covered with them.



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Another early fascination for me was Tolkien's maps of Middle-earth. Over the years, the *Lord of the Rings* maps stood as the model of quality in fantasy cartography. Each incarnation from a variety of projects was special. A sense of importance permeated not only Tolkien's original drawings, but also the later materials created for titles like the MERP game system, Karen Fonstad's *The Atlas of Middle-Earth*, and Daniel Reeve's *Lord of the Rings Map Set*. These are the things I think about when making any of my maps, really.

Take us through the process of creating one of the Storm King's Thunder maps.

For a perspective map like the one of Bryn Shander, I usually start with building a top-down view of the layout and topography.

Depending on how much information is provided by the client, I'll begin by designing the town around the story framework. Then, after using Photoshop to transform the two-dimensional footprint into a surface in perspective, I simply let my mind wander.

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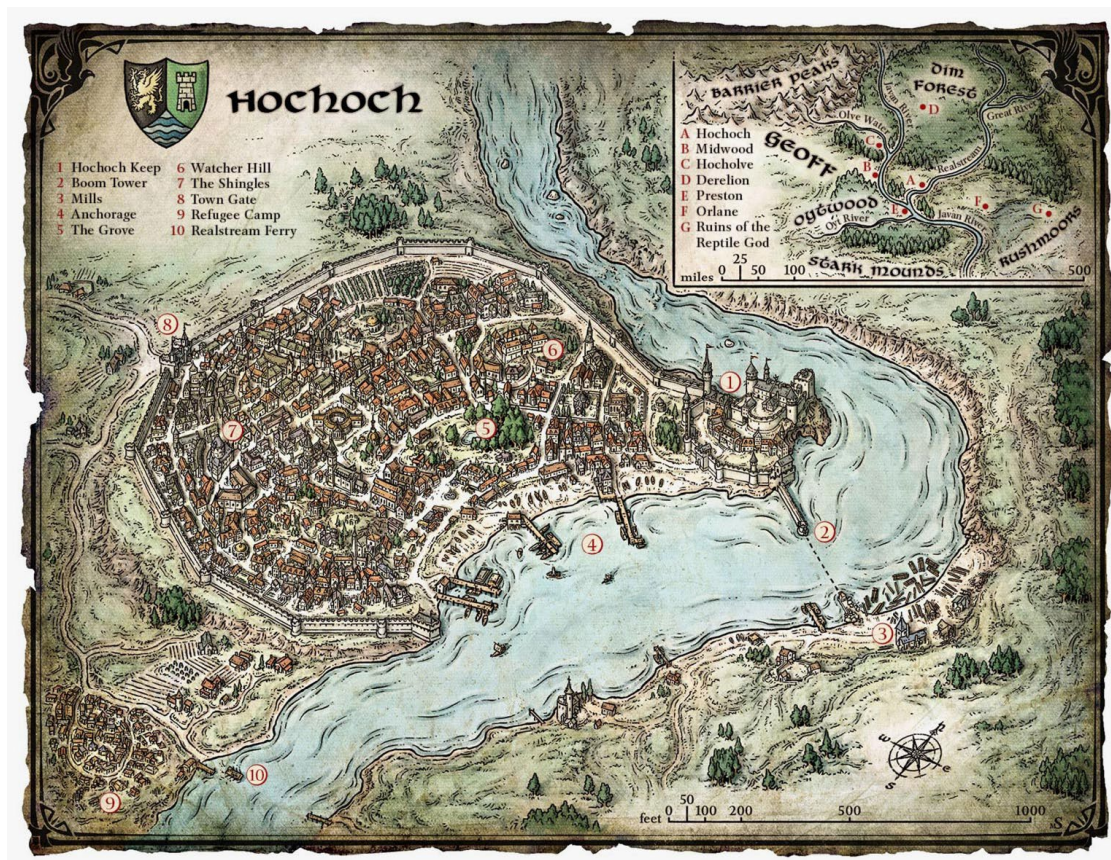
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Depending on how much information is provided by the client, I'll begin by designing the town around the story framework. Then, after using Photoshop to transform the two-dimensional footprint into a surface in perspective, I simply let my mind wander.

What were the most rewarding and most challenging parts of the map work for Storm King's Thunder ?

Having the opportunity to contribute to the world and game that I've loved for over thirty years is always incredibly rewarding. The challenging part is to understand how much rests on the quality of the work that I do and not become terrified by the prospect. Sure, it's fiction and no one will get lost in the wilderness only to succumb to the elements if I misplace a few details. But fans of D&D can still be

tough critics, myself included.



(Select to view)

Your city maps, including Neverwinter and Menzoberranzan, are wonderfully detailed. Do you draw on real-life city plans for inspiration?

Yes, when I'm working on a city that hasn't been developed previously, I often do extensive research. Much of that time is spent looking at old settlements and satellite photos of historic sites. Many locations might not have a direct correlation to places in the real world, but I still take inspiration where I can while considering logical patterns of behavior and the way cultures adapt to the needs and particulars of their environment.

Tell us a bit about the creation of the map of the Sword Coast for Dungeonology?

I mentioned to Kate Irwin, my main art director at WotC, that I'd love to work on an updated map of the Forgotten Realms if it was on the to-do list. Finally, the opportunity arose last year, and a commission for the master map of Northwest Faerûn was sent my way. I couldn't have been more excited. I'd already worked on a number of maps of smaller Spellplague-era regions of the continent,

but this dwarfed everything prior.



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My main concern in developing the new map was to make sure that the final artwork was large and open enough to accommodate future modifications by WotC, as well as for the games DMs and players run themselves. As a result, the final artwork is absolutely huge. While still readable at a glance in its entirety, the truly important aspect is its ability to remain useful, readable, and evocative even when zoomed in to a massive degree. The Realms needs to be a living, breathing world, so I wanted to make a map that was highly detailed yet open enough for future stories to be played out within it.

What have been your favorite D&D pieces to work on?

The isometric cutaways I created for books like the fifth edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Murder at Baldur's Gate* have a special place in my heart. Sure, they might not be as strictly useful as regional maps or battle maps, but they're just so much fun to draw.

What kinds of things do you like to draw and paint, aside from mapmaking? Also, please tell us more about the spiderbear **that's appeared online!**

I've recently slowed down my commissioning schedule in order to go back to art school and think about that question in more depth. I love telling stories, and the role of an explorer. Bringing new horizons into

my audience's view seems to be what I'm geared for.



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As for the spiderbear, that little bit of nightmare fuel will soon appear in my own independent contribution to the RPG industry. Just imagine a hungry trapdoor spider the size of a hatchback crossed with the grumpiness of a bear woken too early from its winter nap. Stick it in a cave by the side of a footpath that your adventurers are traveling on, and voila! Instant shenanigans! It's part of a personal project I'm working on titled *Schleyscapes* that should be ready to go live soon, so keep an eye out.

What would be your dream fantasy-art project if time and resources were no object?

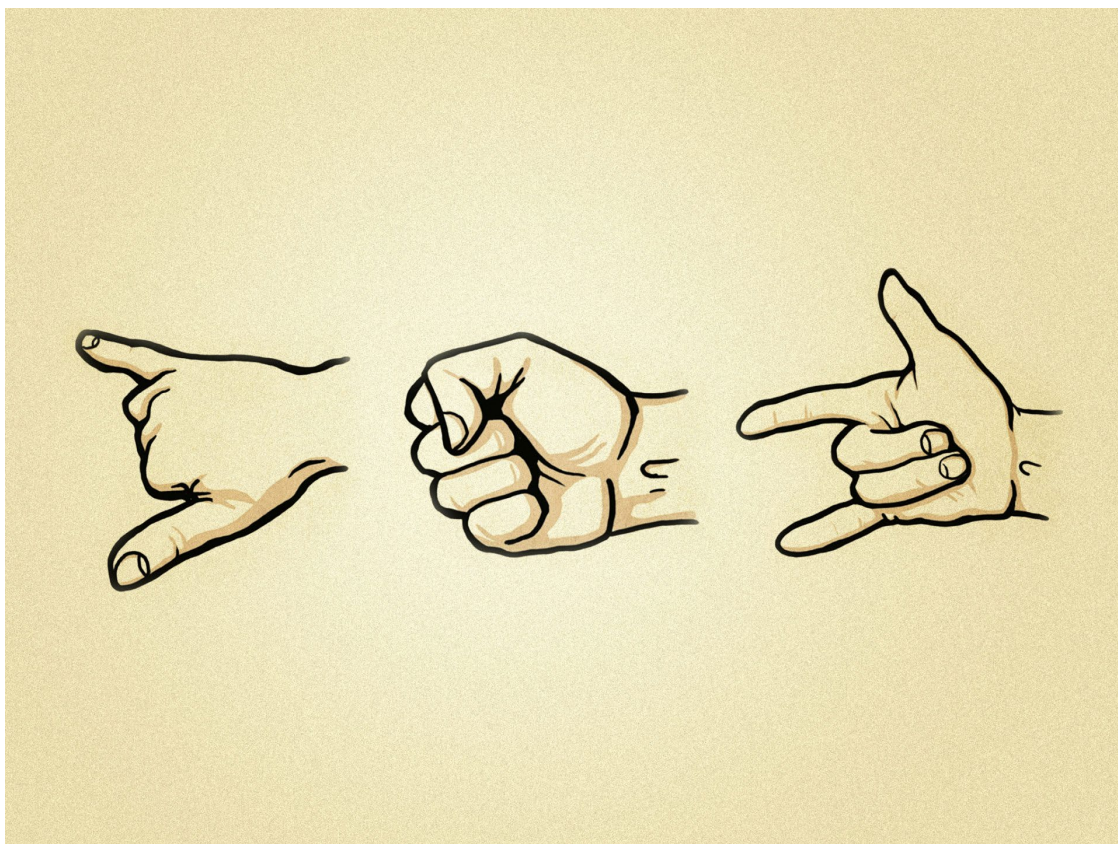
I've been working on a long-term dream project for a while now, but

am keeping it under wraps until I'm done with my time at school. Part of the reason I've gone back is so I can do justice to the idea that I'm developing. Let's just say that it's epic in scope and will play to my strengths. *Schleyscapes*, by the way, ties into it directly, and will act as an episodic introduction to the broader project.

What's next for you? What other projects have you got on the horizon? Where can readers see more of your work?

I'm currently wrapping up a new D&D project for Wizards, and *Schleyscapes* should be ready for its initial release soon. You can always follow me on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Tumblr](#), or [Google+](#). Finally, most all of my recent work can be viewed at www.mikeschley.com, where you can also find my online shop containing tons of artist's prints and high-resolution digital maps.

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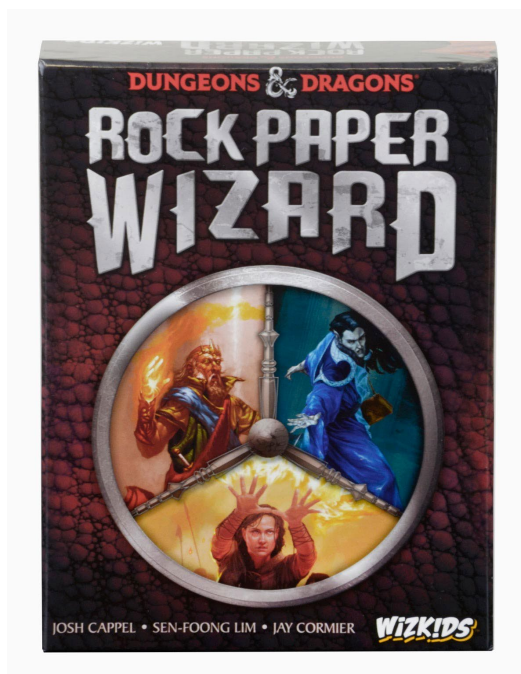


Rock Paper Wizard

Prepare for a magical battle involving strategy, tactics, and—most of all—fun!

Rock Paper Wizard is a brand-new card game from WizKids, which combines spells, gestures, a little bit of cunning, and a hint of luck to deliver a fast-paced party game for three to six players. It's an ideal offering for D&D novices and more experienced players alike. Dragon+ caught up with Zev Shlasinger, WizKids' director of board games, to learn more about the making of Rock Paper Wizard.

According to Shlasinger, the target audience for Rock Paper Wizard is anyone who enjoys light-hearted gaming. "It's accessible, and what's great is that people who aren't into traditional board games can quickly pick it up. Bring it out



at the holidays or for family game night and you're going to have a good time. It's a great stocking stuffer!"

The basic idea behind the game is a classic mage's dilemma, no doubt familiar to many D&D players. A number of powerful

wizards have teamed up to slay a monstrous red dragon, but now must decide how to divide the spoils of its golden treasure hoard. Rather than simply drawing lots or taking equal shares (because where would the fun be in that?), the wizards decide to initiate an almighty spell battle, with the winner taking the spoils.

"Who hasn't had that idea come up after a night of roleplaying?" says Shlasinger. "The goal is to accumulate 25 gold pieces, each representing a share of the dragon's hoard. You have to see what spells are available, then cast the right one at the right time in order to gain gold. Your ability to grab gold pieces depends on being close to the hoard, so you need to jockey into position to take advantage of that."

But how exactly do you portray such an epic sorcerous battle in a fun and interesting way? As Shlasinger explains, the mechanics of the game are actually straightforward. "A group of spell cards are placed on the table, showing the spells available for that round. When 'Rock, Paper, Wizard' is chanted, players reveal the spells they wish to cast by matching the hand gestures found on the spell cards. But they also point that gesture toward the player on whom they wish to cast the spell." As each spell takes effect, it can move a wizard closer or farther away from the dragon's hoard—or a spell might even snatch away some of the hard-won gold already in a wizard's possession. There's plenty of scope for devious tactics, and some thoughtful

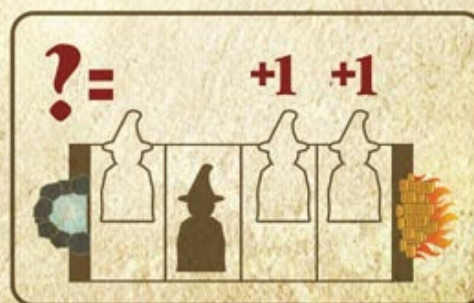
spellcasting choices are also required.



Although Rock Paper Wizard combines elements of a board game, a gesture game, a card game, and a spellcasting game, blending these diverse elements into a workable design was surprisingly easy. “It wasn’t hard at all, which is a tribute to the designers,” says Shlasinger. “All the elements seemed to fit perfectly together, which is truly the mark of something special. When everything seems so easy, it highlights the great skill involved with the implementation.”

People who have played Dungeons & Dragons will recognize some familiar magic in Rock Paper Wizard. Each wizard’s spellbook contains plenty of well-known spells such as fireball, dimension door, burning hands, misty step, ice storm, and charm person. “There are twenty-three spells in the game in total,” Shlasinger says, “with a twenty-fourth that you can claim as a gift with a purchase from your friendly local game store.” However, Rock Paper Wizard also contains the odd wild card element, just to keep players on their toes. “One of the really fun parts is the wild surge mechanic. When two wizards cast the same spell on each other, it turns into a wild surge. Each player draws a random spell from the deck, which becomes the spell that is cast. Lots of surprises happen at that time!”

Levitate



Target advances 1, *then*
caster advances 1 per
wizard closer to the hoard.

PROMO

Rock Paper Wizard is a novel way to experience D&D's magical side. And according to Shlasinger, the aim is very much to immerse players in the game world and keep them in character while they play. "We used assets from fifth edition D&D to bring this product to life, and worked closely with the Wizards team to land the look and feel. The spell cards are really large, so that the gestures can be seen right across the table."

Despite having a smooth transition from design phase to finished version, a few early features of Rock Paper Wizard had to be cast aside, as they didn't survive the rigors of playtesting. "The game originally had a bluffing element, but it bogged things down. So that was removed and the focus was returned to casting spells." The game has already made its debut at the renowned Essen Game Fair in Germany, and feedback was extremely positive. "The players loved it as much as we do," says Shlasinger.



When asked what wizardly wisdom he would like to impart to players of Rock Paper Wizard, Shlasinger considered carefully (possibly wary of giving away some of his own strategies) before offering the following advice: "It's important to note that casting a spell at someone going before you is very risky. You can't target their spells, since they will have resolved before your spell. So if you plan on targeting a player earlier in the turn, make sure your spell affects their gold pieces or their position on the board—not the actual spell they choose to play."

For Shlasinger, choosing the best part of bringing Rock Paper Wizard to life is easy. "Seeing it all come together and watching the expressions of joy from our players." Although the design of the

game meant that it could have been adapted to a number of settings or systems, for Shlasinger, there was only ever one real choice. “I immediately thought that this was a great, fun experience that would resonate with people around a gaming table. Dungeons & Dragons was the perfect brand to make it shine.”

To find out more about Rock Paper Wizard, visit the product page or the official WizKids site . Curious about the official rules? Those are also available now for download.

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Paint by Numbers

Bring your miniatures to life with Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures.

Miniatures have always lent a special touch to Dungeons & Dragons, adding charm, helping to create atmosphere, and allowing players to really identify with their characters (and those characters' many adversaries). But many players view painting miniatures as a daunting task. Have you ever wondered how to go about painting your own figures? Perhaps you're worried about putting together miniatures that require assembly, or you're uncertain what's involved with priming and preparation? Or maybe you've painted miniatures a few times, but would like some extra tips for making them look their best?

In spring 2017, WizKids will be releasing **Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures**, an all-new line of unpainted minis featuring Dungeons & Dragons creatures and characters already fully primed and assembled. This collection includes a wide variety of races and classes from the *Player's Handbook* (including both male and female player characters), as well as an assortment of fan-favorite monsters. Character packs will also include both lower-level and higher-level versions of a character to reflect your journey as you level up.

Even if you've never painted a miniature before, don't worry. Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures are the perfect opportunity to try a little D&DIY. This beginner's painting guide was put together by WizKids' very own in-house team, and provides step-by-step instructions on how to approach painting your very first figure. Even if you're a complete D&DIY novice, you'll find plenty of handy hints and tips here to guide your brushwork, and by the time you've finished your first figure, you'll be as confident as an old paintbrush pro.

Set Up and Checklist



Before painting your miniature, you should secure the following supplies from your friendly local game shop.

- Paints
- Small brushes
- Water
- Miniatures
- Glue (if you want to use the round black base included with your miniature)

Almost as important is finding a bright, well-lit workspace in your home or workshop, so that you can easily see the effect of each color layer and pick out the fine details on each figure.

Priming and Assembly

Normally, when getting ready to paint your first mini, you'd want to start off by priming it. But with Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures, you'll be able to skip this step. WizKids' miniatures come preprimed with Acrylicos Vallejo primer, so they're ready to paint right out of the pack.



For some complex miniatures, putting together the various pieces of a figure can be tricky. But as with priming, all of the character classes in the Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures range come fully assembled—and of the creatures in the initial launch, only the griffon requires assembly. All figures come with a separate black base that can be easily attached with glue if you so desire.

Base Coat



Now that you're all set up, you're ready to jump in. The base coat

forms the basic color palette of your miniature. When you paint it, you'll want to start from the "center" of the mini—first painting clothing and exposed body, then working your way out. This makes it easier to add details to the figure's weapons and accessories later on.

Let's start with the human rogue from the Nolzur's Marvelous Miniatures collection. We'll begin by painting a base coat on the clothing, including the cloak and pants, and using green and red primary colors to provide lots of contrast. Then we move on to the skin, using a fine brush. Always use a thin coat of paint to avoid covering up details. Add a tiny bit of water to the paint to start with, and apply a second base coat if needed.



Next, we'll use brown and natural colors to fill in the miniature's boots, staff, and accessories. We can also take this opportunity to give her hair a rich, dark look.

Finally, we finish our base coat at the bottom of our miniature by painting the base. Be careful not to move the miniature at this point. Before applying the fine details, you'll want to be sure your mini is dry to avoid smudging.



That's the basic work done. Laying down a smooth base coat is pretty much all you need to do to get your miniature looking good enough for the tabletop. However, with just a few additional steps, you can take your miniatures from looking good to looking amazing. These advanced techniques are actually surprisingly easy once you've practiced them a few times, and will make a huge difference to the look of your painted minis. So be brave, be bold, and let's press on!

Apply Details

Use your finest brush to bring out the features of the rogue's necklace, the lacing of her boots, and the wrapping on her staff. Don't worry too much about making this coat look perfect, as we'll be dry brushing it later to further highlight these aspects.



Dark Wash



Our next step is to embellish the appearance of our miniature by adding a dark wash. Mix your base coat coloring with brown or black, then dilute it with water. For your first few attempts, go with slightly more water than you think you ought to, and reapply as needed. You can make your dark wash thicker as you learn the intricacies of the effect. Applying the mixture to the detailed areas of your figure brings out natural-looking shadows that add depth and texture to your miniature. Take a look at the rogue in the before-and-after pictures. You'll see that many of the small details pop out, particularly on her staff. This miniature will appear even more impressive when stalking down a corridor or lurking in the shadows of a tabletop dungeon!

Dry Brush

The final step to complete your figure's look is to dry brush some great-looking highlights. This time, you'll use your base color undiluted, using as little paint as possible to emphasize the high points on the miniature. Grab a cloth or paper towel and wipe off the excess paint on your brush (a few quick swipes will do) before applying the paint to the miniature. Then move the brush back and forth across (perpendicular to) the high points of the figure until you see the paint deposited from the brush to those ridges.

The motion you want is a flicking of the brush *across* the area you wish to highlight. Once one of the areas you wish to highlight is complete, you just move up and down the line, flicking the brush

across it. Keep depositing paint a little bit at a time until you're fully satisfied with the effect.

The resulting look mimics the way light and shade play out across folds and furrows in cloth, leather, wood, and other materials. You can use this technique on any area of the miniature with ridges or folds—including hair, boots, and weapons—to bring out the high points easily and dramatically in just a few minute's time.

And that's it—you're done! Congratulations on painting your mini. Not so daunting after all, was it?

For your first figures, give yourself plenty of time between steps to let the paint dry. Many experienced painters find that it's fun to work on a couple of figures at a time, letting you swap back and forth between them as they dry.

Thanks for reading, and happy painting!

Though this guide is intended for people new to miniature painting, more experienced painters can find endless resources online—including an entire [subreddit](#). On the Wizards of the Coast website, Daniel Gelon created a [video tutorial series](#) detailing some miniature construction and painting techniques during D&D's *Elemental Evil* storyline. This month's [Video and Audio Highlights](#) also has more tips.

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D&Design

Go wild! But start basic . . . and also, go wild!

Growing up, Emi Tanji submerged herself in fantasy books filled with dragons and unlikely heroes, and spent countless hours playing RPGs on Super Nintendo. It was, she admits, an almost-perfect preparation for her work as a senior graphic designer for Wizards of the Coast. Although she hadn't really played D&D before joining the Wizards team, she now relishes her role as a “stinky, deistic, megalomaniac goblin shaman” in a campaign that's already over seven years old—and which secretly, she doesn't ever want to end.

Tanji's design credits are impressive. Having joined Wizards during the days of fourth edition, her first major project was the *Lords of Waterdeep* board



game, and she describes the opportunity to be a part of the development of fifth edition D&D as both an honor and an opportunity for growth. Her enthusiasm and passion for her

work is infectious, and make her the perfect person to impart the lessons of great D&Design.

How do you approach D&D design, cartoons, and illustration? With a light heart and a good sense of humor. My job normally calls for graphic design in the form of layout, branding, and marketing assets, plus some cringing with PowerPoint. So to get to dabble in illustration and fun graphics is a huge treat for me.

In regards to the holiday cards, I'm fortunate to get to pull from the talent and inspiration of our senior creative art director **Shauna Narciso**, as well as D&D writer and designer Adam Lee. Sometimes we'll gather other team members, and after a few rounds of getting all the bad puns out of our systems, Shauna will create a magnificent little doodle. I then try my best to translate it into something enjoyable we can share.

Talk us through the creation of your holiday cards this year. When the request comes in, the first order of the day is to get brainstorming! Shauna and I will try to pick the brains of other D&D team members for some terrible puns, or for wordplay on D&D characters, creatures, and lore.

After our initial brainstorm, we'll narrow the long list into a couple of key phrases or subjects to focus on, and it's no surprise to find I usually favor our wonderful monsters. That's when I first start sketching some ideas out, as you'll

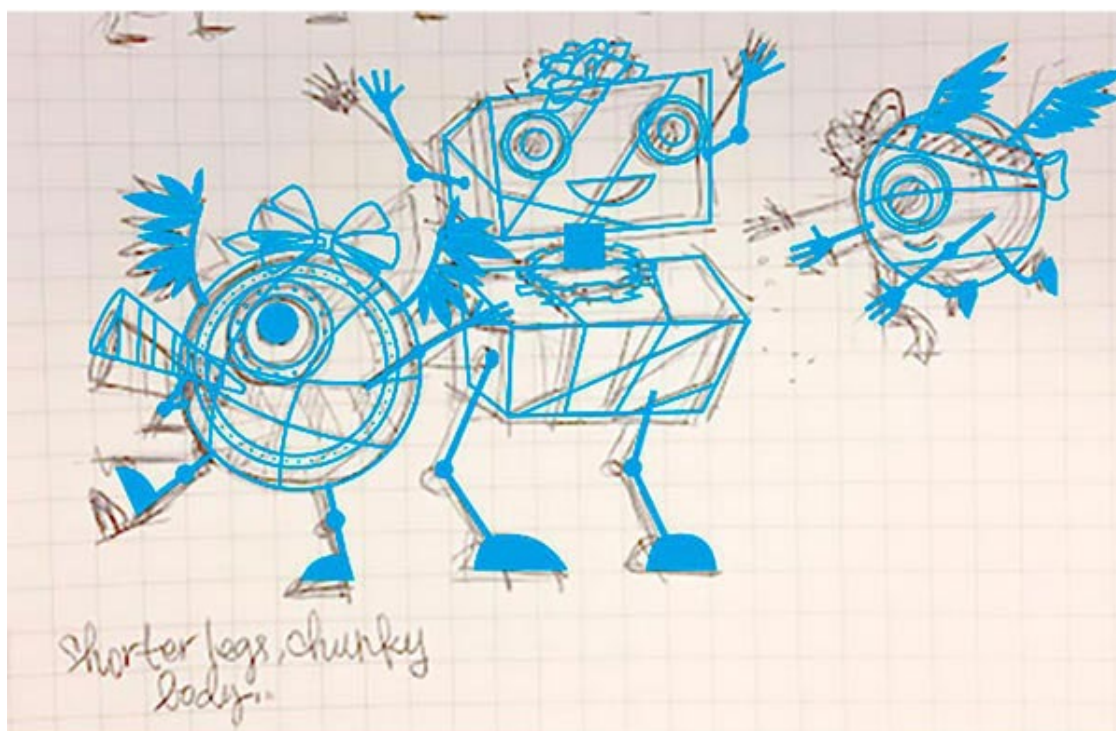
see from the doodles on the page. It's here that I can let my imagination run wild, trying out plenty of different ideas and treatments until I find one I like.

Once I'm happy and have settled on a particular idea, I'll go back and run it by Shauna. She'll come up with little tweaks and suggestions (and sometimes if we're lucky, one of her own fun doodles!).



Next, I make all the necessary revisions and take my mess of a sketch into Illustrator to outline shapes and add color. Of course, if you're making a card using good-old-fashioned paper and pens, you could trace over your sketch to get a more polished final design. Or if you're not great at drawing, you could just print out some of your favorite D&D pictures and stick them on brightly colored card.

Next, I add some text and images to fit into the frame, and then I move it over to Photoshop for extra shading and additional textures. Once that's all done, Shauna approves with a mighty THUMBS UP. Finally, we send the finished work out into the world with hopes that it brings a little smile to our awesome audience!



We really liked the D&D snowflakes from last year. Tell us about how those were made.

Thank you! The **D&D snowflakes** were a wonderful proposal by the always-encouraging Greg Bilslund. We began discussing what iconic monsters would be the most recognizable (beholder, mind flayer, red dragon—and I threw in the gelatinous cube for fun). Then we sketched out some ideas and experimented to see if the shapes could actually be cut out without losing a finger.



What hints and tips would you offer readers for making their own

DIY D&D creations?

Go wild! But start basic . . . and also, go wild! The Dungeons & Dragons world is immense, and the adventures and stories that players find themselves in create a bottomless well of content. My favorite subject for anything DIY would be our monsters. You can never go wrong with a beholder—twelve circles and a bunch of lines (ten eyestalks in total; make sure you get all of them). Page through your *Monster Manual* and you'll have no lack of ideas. Be sure to [go to Facebook and show us what you do!](#)



Who are your favorite artists? Who are you inspired by?

Growing up, Akira Toriyama and Yoshitaka Amano were among my favorites. During college, I could not get enough of Jeremy Fish, Audrey Kawasaki, and Hydro74 (the artist featured on the [cover of issue 2](#) of *Dragon+*, as well as the creator of the alternative cover for *Volo's Guide to Monsters*). But as for a favorite, I don't think I'd ever be able to choose. I could never stop drinking up the detail and fluidity you see in the work of James Jean, but I'd also never say no to an encyclopedia of fat birds by Joy Ang.

As for inspiration, every moment we're alive, we are gifted with so much inspiration. Our senses are constantly offering us so much, by just being aware. It's wonderful! Then imagine getting to walk into a building every day, as I do, and be immersed in the work of talented storytellers and visual influencers—what a life!

How would you describe your own art style?

I'd describe my style of art as: clunky yet hopefully enjoyable, with a recurring theme of chubby dogs.



Where can readers see more of your work?

Keep an eye out for our next book! (Ha!) And I also have a [Twitter account](#) I don't often use, but maybe I could be encouraged to get with the times?

What does the future hold? What are your next big projects and goals?

I hope to continue on this exciting ride, and to keep getting better as I go. I'm a huge fan of encouraging imagination and storytelling in young minds, so I'd love to see more adventure modules created with kids in mind. Especially things like [Heroes of Hesiod](#) (created for fourth edition, but with simplified rules that make it an easy introduction to roleplaying games and D&D).

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Fiction: Return to the Steading

We return to a famed steading—though one no longer ruled by a hill giant chief.



***Author's Note:** The following short story kit-bashes elements from a number of D&D's worlds. Though Storm King's Thunder takes place across the Forgotten Realms, its storyline felt like a compelling opportunity to consider how elements of the classic G1-2-3 Against the Giants adventure modules might fit into that story—whether in Greyhawk, as originally written, or in the Realms.*

I beg your indulgence.

Dry, hidden, and large enough to shelter a full party along with associates, hirelings, and mounts, the cave had once been used to stage forays against the hill giants' steading. Now it remained in

use as a way station on the journey to the steading for those seeking out its new inhabitants—the selfsame adventurers that had cleared out the giants years before.

The tiefling Garret poked through the meager supplies left by the last group of travelers. There wasn't much, and Ocras had consumed most of it already—primarily moldy oats, eaten straight out of old bags that might have been taken from the steading's original inhabitants. Garret looked up at his hill giant companion in utter disgust. But he was making his own foray against the steading, and necessity had forced him to bring the giant along.

“We reach the steading tomorrow,” Garret said, dropping an emptied sack to the ground. Tonight, he would eat from the last of the stores he'd more recently acquired, and which he kept hidden from the giant by need.

“Good,” Ocras rumbled. The hill giant's speech was slow and labored, as if he carried all the words of Common he knew in a weathered bag—something like the one filled with useless odds and ends that swung from his belt—and was at pains to sort through and produce the ones needed. “A banquet for us there? You think?”

“Only if you plan to dine on sword blades and crossbow bolts,” Garret said . . . although given what he knew of his companion, it was possible he might. Hill giants, as he'd so recently observed, ate prodigiously, without equal or end. Along their journey to the steading, Ocras had eaten through their entire store of iron rations—a three-week supply, gone in three days.

The food they'd eaten since then largely came to them by way of a rust-colored magical sack in Garret's possession. That bag of tricks could be used to conjure up an odd array of creatures that Garret had been forced to make unusual use of: a summoned lion could be ordered to go hunting, returning with deer (which Ocras had eaten raw) and rabbits (which Garret had managed to hide and cook). A giant boar under Garret's control did an admirable job seeking out truffles and edible roots, one last meal's worth of which remained hidden in Garret's pack.

Using the bag came with risk, though, as Garret had found out the first time he tried to do so. Producing a goat had seemed less than

ideal, but before Garret could dismiss it, he had watched horrified as Ocras devoured the creature. Garret had been forced to scold the giant, and from that point on, he used the bag and ordered its creatures to hunt and forage only while Ocras was sleeping. In that time, the giant had since consumed three whole deer, two wild goats, over a dozen hares, several dozen trout, a boar, a beaver, and a variety of small creatures caught by Garret's summoned hunters—all of which Garret claimed were the products of his own powerful magic.

Still, it was very much in the tiefling's interest to keep his companion fed. Ocras had been born and raised within the steading; he knew its layout better than anyone alive, including its current occupants. Garret needed the giant to guide him, while Ocras only cared that he was sufficiently fed along the way—and more than once, Garret had caught the giant looking him over when the previous rations had been eaten, and while Garret waited for nightfall so his fantastic beasts could catch their next meal.

“Remember,” Garret warned him, perpetuating the tale that had endeared the giant to his cause in the first place. “I am your familiar, and it would be unwise to eat me.”

To prove that bluff, Garret had needed another magic item in his possession: a unique monstrous figurine fashioned into the hilt of his dagger, and whose wondrous power allowed Garret to conjure a temporary servant even more daunting than the creatures of the rust bag. The tiefling had been forced to summon this servant to keep Ocras at bay when he noticed the giant giving him a too-hungry look. Except that after the creature appeared in a burst of transforming smoke, frightful and squawking, Ocras had wrestled it down to take great bites from its vulture-like wings . . . and Garret was forced to enter the fray and transform it back before the giant ate his fiendish guardian whole.

“Your magic. It is powerful,” Ocras had agreed afterward—whereupon he had demanded that Garret summon “Rooster” (as the giant dubbed the creature) as often as he could, to let him wrestle and bite from again.

Garret had done so sparingly since—with Rooster appearing

progressively more bedraggled and enraged each time.



Oaken palisades formed a wooden crown atop the hillside, seemingly sized to fit Grolantor, god of the hill giants. The timber walls could be seen for miles around, once protecting the giants while they raided nearby human towns and hauled back plunder—until the giants were themselves raided, and their steading taken in repayment.

“Giants and devils!” the steading’s human guards now called out from their watchtower. “We’re under attack!”

“Open the gates, you witlings.” From the ground below, Garret waved off the excess of alarm. “A tiefling is hardly a devil, except by heritage. And there’s just the one hill giant with me, besides. Is this how you treat emissaries paying homage to your commander—”

Before he could even finish his bluff, there came the sound of ballistae being cranked and made ready to fire upon them.

“Emissaries sent by whom?”

“King Hekaton himself. The storm giant offers his respect to those who conquered this steading—”

Before Garret could continue, Ocras reached up to tap the points of a ballista’s bolt through one of the palisade’s arrow slots.

“Romble and Strong-chin’s old crossbows,” the giant noted.

“Hey, you leave those,” one of the guards demanded.

“They let me fire them from the watchtower. I was too young to wind them myself. I remember, they wind them for me.”



Commander Steeplejack had led the original raid against the steading, gathering other heroes from the Order of the Gauntlet. While some in his party had continued on, advancing their fight against frost giants and fire giants farther north, Steeplejack stayed to claim the steading for his own stronghold. Now, the commander’s fellow humans, half-elves, and dwarves sat together at the same long tables the giants

once used, converted for the small folks' use with short ladders bolted onto the benches.

As he and Ocras were led through the great hall, Garret recognized Gleep the Eyebiter, Cloyer the Magsman, and Roaky Swerked—all heroes from Steeplejack's original party. He also noted how he was the only tiefling here in the great hall . . . and reflected on how Ocras was likely the first hill giant to have entered the stading since the rest of his clan had been driven out.

As they passed by each table in turn, Garret could hear the sound of knives being drawn from their sheaths all around him.

Commander Steeplejack and his advisors sat atop wooden chairs that had been added to their benches. Although he presided from a higher table, the commander dressed modestly in old half plate, weathered with the dents and dings of battle—many of which had been earned in the raid against the stading, no doubt. The commander raised a hand, not in greeting to Garret and Ocras, but to the rest of the assembled, telling them to stay their blades . . . at least for the moment.

“A man of his people,” Garret called out, indicating the shield hung on the wall behind the head table. It had been painted with the devices of not just Steeplejack's family, but of other nearby towns.

“All the settlements this stading now must defend,” Steeplejack said in response. “Now tell me, *emissaries*—who are you, and why trouble our stading?”

“Allow me to introduce—”

“I am Ocras.” The hill giant stepped forward. “Chief Nosnra's son.”

A murmur rose from the assembled guests. *Could it be true?*

Steeplejack raised a hand again, for calm. “And you've come for . . . what? Revenge?”

Ocras shook his head. “You defeat my father. By right, this your stading now. His chair, your chair. His bed, your bed.”

“A noble sentiment, from a lowly brute. But what proof have you that

you are who you say, and no mere random *thing* lumbering down from the hills?”

Garret whispered to the giant. “Tell Commander Steeplejack something only you would know about the steading.”

“I remember the cooks made my favorite stew. Dwarf was too gamey. Elf, too tender. With man was best.”

Garret could almost sense the giant’s mouth watering as he spoke. Grumbles passed through the great hall. Instead of knives, now swords were being drawn around them.

“About the *building*,” Garret hissed. “Not about life here.”

“I remember the rain, how the privies overflow something fierce. How carrion crawlers float in with the water.”

Alongside the grumbling, at least there were a few barks of laughter this time.

“That is still true,” Steeplejack said. “But not sufficient.”

“I remember a door at the back of my father’s bedchamber. Mother’s maids use it to visit him. I remember a good shield in his private hall. It hangs on the wall. I remember a gift of javelins in his arms room. They crackle like lightning when you throw them.”

“That is good,” Steeplejack nodded. “And tell me, giant—who is this companion of yours?”

“My familiar. I summon him. Now he must serve seven years.”

“More likely a thief you caught who spun that fanciful lie. But I see no chain holding him, so he should have escaped your service long ago. Unless he has some private reason for staying. What that might be, I couldn’t guess—I dare not gauge the minds of the infernal.”

I stay because the giant can lead me to his father’s treasure vault.
Garret kept the thought to himself.

“I have not taken this steading for my own vainglory.” Steeplejack pointed at Ocras as he spoke. “Your kind hid behind its walls to make

raids against the towns of the small folk with impunity. When we cleared the steading, I vowed to hold it as a fortress to protect those same towns, and I have. Only nowadays, more and more of your kind have returned to these hills, attacking farms and homesteads. This steading is needed more than ever, but there is great cost to its defense and upkeep.”

Garret slid a hand toward one of his purses. The one with the fewest coins. *So it's to be a donation, is it . . . ?*

But Steeplejack continued. “If this is truly Nosnra’s son, he’ll be well familiar with even the smallest, darkest corners of his father’s steading. He’ll remember where his father secured such treasure as was stolen from the homes of good folk.”

The tiefling smiled to himself. *So you haven't found the vaults yet either.* As guests, albeit unwelcome, Garret knew that he and Ocras should at least be housed for the night. Whatever guards were placed over them, they would deal with them, then sneak out on their own. Then after Ocras showed him the vault, Garret would sneak off on *his* own. But at least he wouldn’t leave Steeplejack empty-handed. The commander would retain a hill giant prisoner.

“Kill them now,” someone in the great hall shouted out. Roaky, the old priest. “Be done with them. The dead can speak as well, with the proper spells.”

“No,” Steeplejack said. “I cannot trust a devil’s corpse not to lie. Or a giant’s to say anything intelligent at all. They’ll be kept alive, provided they continue to speak good and true.” He motioned for the guards. “Escort them down to the cell block.”

“Oh, not there!” Ocras bellowed. “The Keeper! He is ghastly! Hunchbacked! Half blind! Father locks me in his cells when I am bad!”

“Calm yourself!” Garret hissed. “The Keeper has been dead for years. Steeplejack killed him along with the rest.”

Nevertheless, the hill giant continued to wail. “The Keeper’s apes! They snarl! They poke! In chains, you could not push them away!”

With the hall's attention on Ocras, Garret slid his hand from purse to dagger.

At Steeplejack's order, the guards brought their crossbows to bear.

"The apes!" Ocras raised his arms as if still chained and trying to free himself. His elbows knocked against the nearest guards, shoving them into tables. Trenches and tankards clattered. Warriors fell from their chairs.

As a guest, Garret could have plotted his and Ocras's escape, even under guard. As a chained prisoner, he could only dream of escape. They had to flee the hall.

The moment he threw his dagger down, embedding it into the floor, it was as if the weapon held the entirety of a cloud giant's thunderhead, compressed into the confines of its hilt. Garret disappeared entirely within a cloud of roiling smoke that cloaked Ocras up to his neck. The assembled guests cried '*Devil-craft!*', yelling of smoke and brimstone from the Nine Hells. Even the guards pulled back, not wanting to enter the stuff.

"Cheap conjurer's tricks!" Steeplejack shouted over the din. "An ever-smoking bottle, nothing more! Arbalests, let loose on the giant! Fire upon the fiend!"

"Run, you mountainous pile!" Garret had to push against Ocras's legs, hammering on them to get the hill giant moving—and unintentionally placing himself between his companion and the crossbow bolts fired through the smoke. *At least these are human-sized*, Garret thought, *and not the ballistae at the gate*. A few bolts struck the wooden columns of the great hall, or clanged off shields hung along the walls. But they'd been fired blind, and several of the assembled guests were struck as well.

"My leg!" someone cried.

"My husband!"

One shot glanced across Garret's shoulder, drawing blood.

"Secure the front gates!" Steeplejack ordered. "They look to escape!"

The guards started after them, pausing as they neared a hulking figure within the clearing smoke. Which they should have thought odd, since Garret had already driven Ocras away. The fiendish creature, already enraged from its most recent transformations and the giant's attacks, had now been struck with several crossbow bolts as well—and was none too pleased about it.



Garret succeeded in herding Ocras out of the hall, guiding him around a corner. Of course, Steeplejack had not guessed correctly. The smoke had not been from a magical bottle, but from a feature of the figurine worked into the hilt of Garret's dagger, whose fiendish counterpart rose from this magical haze.

Behind, they heard a horrid screech, followed by the panicked screams of the guards as they finally met the magically conjured vrock.

“Rooster,” Ocras chuckled.

“You're meant to shield me,” Garret complained. He held a bandage to his shoulder. “I was nearly taken, while a bolt would hardly cut through your flesh!”

“Hardly any flesh left.” Ocras grabbed his ample belly, giving it a shake. “We barely eat. Use your magic to summon more food?”

“You are no giant. You are a flesh golem, stitched together entirely from stomachs. Or possibly some kind of inevitable, sent to punish me.” Garret could hear guards deploying toward the gates, none of them suspecting that he instead ordered Ocras to lead him deeper into the stading. “But as your familiar, if I die, you'll suffer as well. Remember that.”



The boy must have been the bravest child in the nursery to ask, “Are you bleeding?”

“Perhaps slightly,” Garret admitted.

Behind them, the rest of the children cowered away from Ocras within their playhouse castle, masterfully crafted from old giant-sized

furniture. Garret wasn't sure which area of the steading Ocras had led him to, but like all other areas, it was huge, lit by lamps whose light faded to shadow in the corners. Whichever adults normally oversaw this playroom, they'd answered the summons of the alarm and left the children alone.

"Will you heal?" the boy asked, the only one daring enough to stand outside the playhouse. "I heard devils don't heal, because they can't enter temples for prayers."

Garret had been known to brag about how many arrows of slaying had been inscribed with his name by spurned employers, trading partners, and lovers—and how he had survived them all . . . though this did not seem an appropriate claim to make here in a nursery.

Instead, he merely quipped, "Then you're a brave lad to talk with a devil."

"I'm not afraid of you." The boy produced a holy symbol from around his neck—one of St. Cuthbert's, a tiny silver starburst. "I'm protected against devils."

"Is that so?" Garret smiled. Glancing over, he did not like the way Ocras was testing the playhouse drawbridge; several of the children held it shut against his probing fingers. "Your parents must be proud of their progeny, so brave and faithful."

"Someday, I'll join my father's guards. He commands the steading, so they'll have to take me on."

"Your father . . . is Commander Steeplejack?"

The boy nodded.

From behind in the steading, Garret could hear the guards returning.

"Do you see that large fellow over there?" Garret nodded to the giant. Ocras had finally snapped the playhouse drawbridge chains, exposing the children inside. They stood huddled together, too afraid to scream. "His father used to rule this place."

As the boy turned to look, Garret drew something from a pocket.

“Take this,” he said, handing it to the boy. “Give it to your father when he arrives. You see, it shows a starburst on its face, like your holy symbol. Show it to him, with compliments from Nosnra’s son. Will you do that for me?”

The boy looked at the ring as if it were something alive and dangerous, a tiny mimic curled into the shape of jewelry. But he finally did take it, carefully.

As for the rest of the children, Garret drew forth a small, fuzzy object from his rust-colored bag and tossed it into the playhouse.

The children finally screamed out as a full-sized brown bear appeared.

Garret gave it the command to roar loudly, then to run and hide. “And no eating,” he also ordered, both to the bear and Ocras besides. “Come now, we have to leave.”

The children’s screams would already be drawing the guards, while the steading featured enough halls that the bear would lead them on a merry chase. With luck, it might even find a secure enough crawl space to slumber until it vanished at dawn.

“Now show me to the stairs,” the tiefling said, pushing on the giant to move in the opposite direction.



The guards tore open the door to the nursery, making their way through a gibbering moucher in the form of children: wailing, yelling, laughing, all of them trying to tell what happened at once.

“Easy! Easy there!” The sergeant tried to calm them. “That devil ran through here? And the giant with him? Which way? There’s Steeplejack’s boy—what have you got there, son?”

The boy appeared from the middle of the pack. He wore a huge smile on his face as he held up the ring for everyone to see.



Garret had to shield his eyes even this far down the hallway, as the ring’s shooting stars were unleashed inside the nursery. They

exploded to the sound of the guards crying out in pain and surprise, and the children cheering at the spectacular display. The ring might have only been a faulty, failing version of the powerful item it once was; but the exploding lights it sent forth would still blind and stun the guards, Garret knew, without dealing the children (still shrieking with laughter) any real harm.

“That should occupy them.” The tiefling smiled as he turned back to the kitchens, where Ocras had finally brought them to a staircase leading down. The place was empty, its cooks and servants presumably answering the alarm call, allowing the hill giant to seize an entire roast boar on a massive spit.

Before Ocras could attack his meal, though, Garret thought to order the giant to dip the sizzling carcass into the coals. The dripping grease ignited, turning the back end of the boar into an enormous makeshift torch. They descended the stairs, the giant tearing into the front half greedily.

Garret would never get used to that sound; nothing could quell his own appetite like listening to Ocras eat.

“The Keeper,” Ocras moaned as they reached the bottom, his face covered in grease. “His chamber is there. Across the marshaling area.” He pointed to an old door on the far side of a huge chamber, long abandoned but still showing the tread of countless feet on its black stone floors. “You will protect me from his apes—yes, familiar?”

Garret had to motion the giant well into the empty room for the light of his makeshift torch to reach the far wall. “I told you. His apes died years ago.”

“You killed them back through time? Your magic is powerful.” Ocras placed a heavy hand nervously on Garret’s shoulder, and the tiefling understood that if any creatures were encountered down here, Ocras would crush them underfoot in panic—along with anyone else caught in his way.

“It is powerful, never doubt it. Now, where’s your father’s treasure room?”

The secret door had been designed by stone giant masons—a tribute for Chief Nosnra, and so skillfully made that it had not been discovered even after his death. To complete the project, the masons had gone so far as to sacrifice themselves, melding their bodies invisibly into the stone of the door. The ritual prevented any magical discovery of the door itself, or any scrying of the vaults behind. At least, that had been the tale Ocras told Garret during their journey to the stading.

Whether the tale was true or not, they found the door where Ocras indicated. Simply observed, the stones showed no easily recognizable pattern; but knowing they had formed from the body of a mason, Garret was able to find one stone that vaguely resembled the shape of a hand—an enormous hand held open as if in greeting, or perhaps in warning.

“Come,” he said to Ocras. “Put your hand there.”

Ocras did so, taking hold of the stone image of the hand. Garret heard a satisfying click as this giants’ greeting worked the magical lock, allowing the door to be pushed open.

As they slipped through and Garret closed the door behind them, he saw that the empty chamber beyond featured a series of levers jutting out from the wall.

“They open gates in the next chamber,” Ocras said, pointing to each of the levers in order, and back again. “The next chamber leads to the vault. Somehow.”

Knowing the correct sequence would never return to the giant, Garret instructed Ocras to throw the levers all open instead. From beyond the room came the painful, grinding wails of old machinery brought back to life.

Through another secret door—but of only mundane construction this time—they exited into a huge, dusty chamber. Garret noted where two broad gates had been raised to the south, with a smaller gate raised in the northeast corner of the room. All around him, long needlelike spikes had been driven into the walls.

“We kept manticores there,” Ocras said, nodding toward the south

end of the silent chamber. “Four of them. To guard the little treasure. Where my father stores his copper.”

“What of the bigger treasure,” Garret asked. “Where did your father store his gold?”

“And you call me hungry,” Ocras said with a deep, rumbling laugh. “You are hungry as well.” The giant led Garret to the north, where the open gate brought them to a hallway beyond. And where the hallway turned at a curious hitch, Ocras showed him the next secret door.

Over the course of their journey, Ocras had warned Garret that this second door was locked in ways he didn’t understand. Garret had ignored him, knowing that stone giants would have built this door as well. But as he searched for its mechanism, there was no sign here of another stone giant’s hand in the rock. No way he could see to activate the secret door, which was hardly the outline of a door at all.

No—I have not come this far to fail at the final threshold! he despaired.

While the tiefling searched, Ocras began a mental inventory. “My father stores gifts here for his maids . . . I remember an iron box filled with platinum . . . I remember a coffer filled with jewelry . . .”

Increasingly frantic, Garret leaned in at different angles. If there was a door, it had also once been a stone giant in life. But with no means of repeating the greeting of the first door, how else did one ask a dead giant to step aside?

There. A faint whorl in the stone caught his attention, a huge oval roughly the size and form of . . . a giant’s closed eye. Working by instinct, Garret tapped the stone with the tip of his finger, testing it. Then he pushed it carefully, watching as a thin layer of the stone slid up—opening the eye, and revealing a faint iris within.

As the eye’s gaze fell upon Ocras and recognized Chief Nosra’s son, the door opened to the stading’s rightful heir . . .

And a voice called out from behind:

“We appreciate you bringing us to the stolen treasure.”

Steeplejack appeared from around the corner, flanked by his remaining guards. They'd been badly singed by the ring's shooting stars, and looked to be of little cheer. "I should have known you would still look to steal from the homes of good folk. Thankfully, the grease of your trail was easy enough to follow."

This time, Garret carefully shielded himself behind Ocras from the guards' crossbows. Though he had closed the first secret door securely behind him and the hill giant, he had only assumed that its magic would automatically lock it again. He cursed himself silently as he gestured to the wound at his shoulder and quipped, "I wish no more quarrel with you."

A poor jest, but it was the only one he could think of in the moment. But then Garret had to try to maintain his smile at the sight of the long, low shadow creeping up behind Steeplejack and his guards.

"You came disguised as guests with false intentions," Steeplejack went on, "set to plunder our resources and weaken our defenses. And because of your devilry, many of my guards have been injured. Several might die."

"Yes, my familiar's magic is powerful," Ocras admitted. "I will scold him about it."

The secret door opened to the chieftain's true treasure room. Glancing back into it, Garret saw no exit that way—only a snap-closed trapdoor pit set into the floor, its lid having settled slightly over time to reveal its location.

"You have returned to the steading, and here you will remain. In chains, until you have told us about every hidden coin. And then in graves, to trouble us no more—where you, giant, can tell your father that his chair and bed are uncomfortable, but at least his walls are strong."

"I know that bed." Ocras nodded slowly. "Always lumpy. I cannot fault you there."

"Ocras." Garret carefully pitched the warning in his voice. The shadow had drawn closer, released by the opened gates, and drawn

by the blood of the guards' wounds. "Do not panic . . . but the Keeper has followed Steeplejack, and brought his apes—"

Before he could finish speaking, the giant knocked against him. "The Keeper!" he bellowed. "I see him! I see his shadow!"

It was all the tiefling could manage to not be trampled underfoot. He clung to Ocras's leg as the giant pushed into the treasure room—and stepped onto the covered pit.

Garret tried to land atop Ocras, so as not to impale himself on the spikes below. Overhead, the counterweighted trapdoor swung up and snapped shut again on a final glimpse of Steeplejack and his guards firing their crossbows into the hallway behind—and the skeletal, rotting bulk of the creature that leaped for them, a volley of bolt-like spikes exploding out from its tail as it did.



"Incredible that one still dwells here after all these years," Garret murmured. He thought of Rooster, likewise trapped within the figurine, growing mad. The manticores left to die in their cell would have turned against each other, this last survivor slowly starving to death—only to rise as some manner of undead, waiting in silent hunger. Perhaps the Keeper had dumped some necromantic magic, used to artificially prolong his prisoners' torment, at the fall of the steading.

And perhaps Ocras had been correct to still worry about the apes, also undead and lingering somewhere here within the steading's lower caverns.

"And look—" He pointed to the giant's legs, scratched by the pit's spikes but not so deeply as to bleed. "I knew your thick skin would protect us."

Ocras groaned. "Still not thick enough. You should summon more food. And less spikes."

Does he think I've teleported us somewhere? Garret wondered. *Not into a pit, but a pocket dimension?* But in a way, he supposed that was true. Whether he was an actual familiar or just a pretender, a tiefling's trickery was its own kind of magic, he felt.

The sound of fighting echoed down to them. No matter which side won, they would not be able to emerge safely—at least, not back through the trapdoor. Garret would need more of his ‘devil-craft’ to transport them out.

Many spells had an opposite, depending on the casting. Garret carried one scroll, for instance, that turned flesh to stone. He had been ready to use it when they entered the great hall, if only he could have caught Steeplejack and his guards all at once . . . but there had been too many, spread too far around him. He took it now from his pocket, noting how it could be read falsely, or sinisterly as the saying went, so that its magic took the reverse effect.

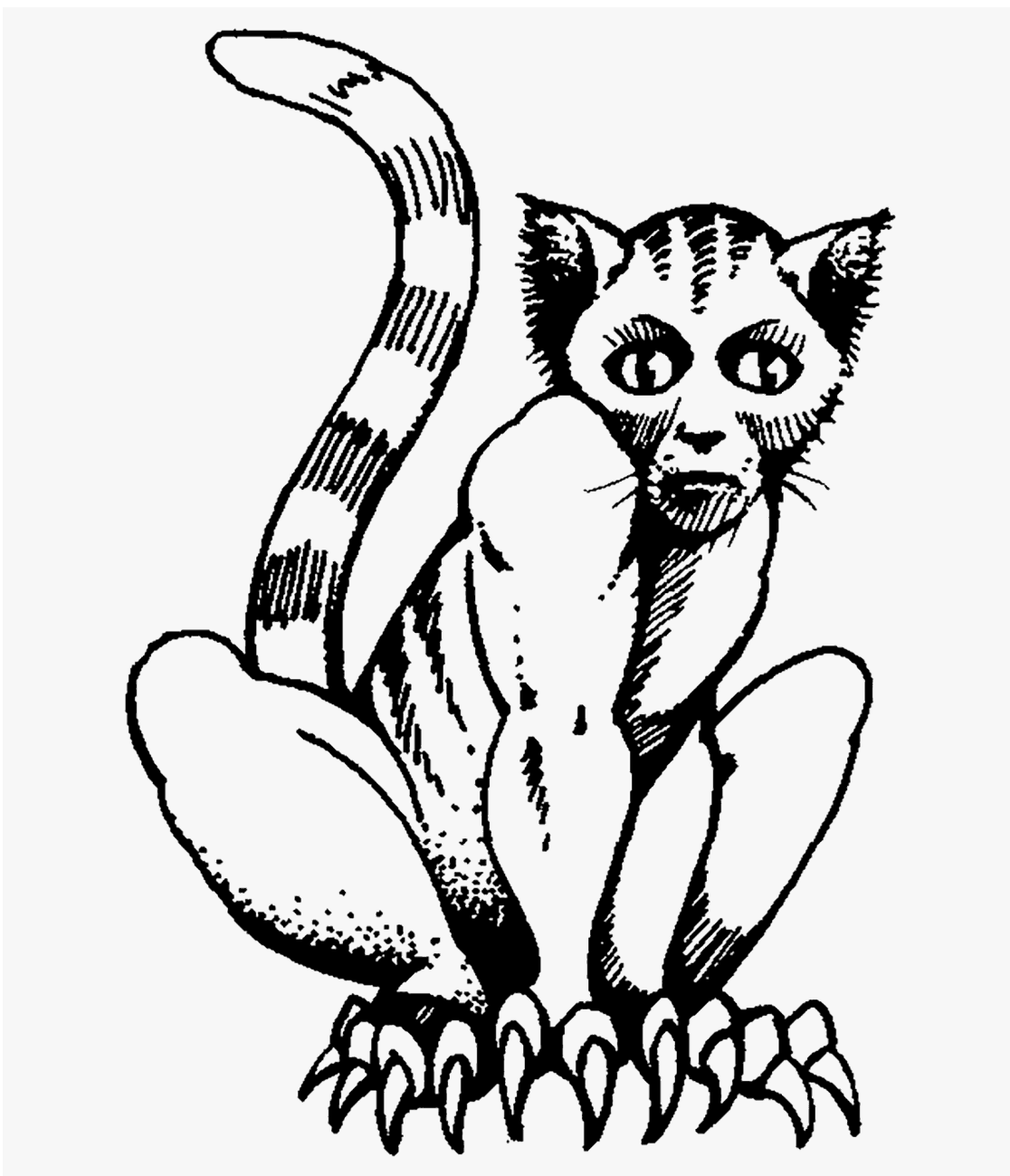
Garret cast the sinister version. A ten-foot section of the pit wall transformed into pink, living flesh, angled up toward the corridor above them, away from the fight against the undead manticore. “Ocras,” he said. Their escape would be contingent upon the hill giant’s answer. They would leave the steading empty-handed—without even his dagger or ring—but at least they would leave. And besides, Ocras also claimed to know his father’s route to the glacial rift of the frost giants. Perhaps the treasures of the jarl and his servants had not all been discovered by those old allies of Steeplejack’s that had continued on from the steading.

“You’ve complained that I haven’t used my magic to summon more food. Now I have,” Garret said, indicating the transformed wall. “You are still hungry, aren’t you?”

If Ocras were hungry, the hill giant would remain his traveling companion for another leg of their journey, while the tiefling would remain his imposter familiar.

Ocras eyed the flesh dubiously. But still, he answered. “Terribly so.”

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Lore You Should Know: Tabaxi vs. tabaxi

As *Volo's Guide to Monsters* introduces the tabaxi to fifth edition D&D, some readers have expressed surprise that the game now has a race of cat people. I've also gotten a number of questions about why they were "shoehorned" into the Forgotten Realms.

The simple answer is this: Tabaxi have been in D&D for ages and the Forgotten Realms from the very beginning.

The tabaxi as a cat-people race first appeared in the game in 1981, in the *Fiend Folio* of first edition AD&D. They subsequently appeared in a handful of places in Forgotten Realms canon, including the original gray-box *Forgotten Realms Campaign Set*. Encountered either as individual NPCs or monsters to be fought (or, in one case, to be transformed into by way of a spell), the tabaxi were never given a backstory, religion, or culture in mainland Faerûn. Maztica is another story, which we'll get to in a moment.

TABAXI (Cat-man)

FREQUENCY: *Rare*
NO. APPEARING: 2-8
ARMOUR CLASS: 6
MOVE: 15"
HIT DICE: 2
% IN LAIR: 15 %
TREASURE TYPE: *Magical sword*
or miscellaneous weapon 5%
NO. OF ATTACKS: 3 *or by*
weapon type
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-3/1-3/1-3
or by weapon type
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Nil*
SPECIAL DEFENCES: *Nil*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Average (high*
cunning)
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic neutral*
SIZE: *M (6½' tall)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*
Attack/Defence Modes: Nil
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: *11/20 + 2 per hit point*



The tabaxi (or cat-men, as they are known to most humans) are a race of intelligent feline humanoids which inhabit the far reaches of tropical jungles, avoiding both humans and sentient non-humans.

(First Edition)

Looking at the totality of tabaxi lore in D&D, they appear rarely and with minimal detail. Their original *Fiend Folio* entry largely focuses on their combat capabilities. The second edition AD&D *Monstrous Manual* is similarly light on cultural details, and says nothing about their practices of worship. Although they appeared in the Birthright campaign setting, they had a more significant presence in the

Planescape setting. There, the tabaxi were presented as worshipers of Bast from the Egyptian pantheon—the cat-goddess revered by numerous cat-beings from D&D lore. (And though there's a rabbit hole of lore we could fall into regarding the murky connections between Bast and the goddesses Sharess and Shar in the Forgotten Realms, it's immaterial to the place of the tabaxi in Faerûn because the link between them and Bast was never firm.)

For *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, we wanted a feline humanoid race with deep roots in D&D lore, and tabaxi fit that bill. Rakastars (another cat-person race) have nearly as long a history in the game, and have appeared in more products. However, the vast



(From *Fires of Zatal*)

majority of those appearances are part of the rakastas' strong presence in the Mystara campaign setting—meaning they come with strings attached and a lot of extant canon. Equally problematic, rakastas have no significant presence in Forgotten Realms lore.

The *Volo's Guide* team talked about the pros and cons of each race for a while, including the confusing fact that the Forgotten Realms has both tabaxi and Tabaxi.

Tabaxi with a capital T is the ancestral name of one of a number of human tribes that traveled east to Faerûn from across the ocean. The Tabaxi were originally from a continent or island known as Katashaka in some sources, and which is generally assumed to be a separate landmass than the area described by the *Maztica Campaign Set*. The *Jungles of Chult* adventure established that the Chultan humans refer to themselves as Tabaxi, being the survivors of intertribal warfare among the emigrating human peoples.

Further confusion about Tabaxi vs. tabaxi is sown by *Fires of Zatal*, an adventure set in Maztica. In it, there are no Tabaxi, but a tabaxi NPC named Chioptl features prominently. *Fires of Zatal* also has a monster description of the race in the style of the *Monster Manual*, but with added Maztican details such as the fact that they speak an ancient form of Payit and that tabaxi tribes worship the various Maztican deities.

Ultimately, we settled on using the tabaxi because it offered us more freedom in the design of the race.



(Volo's Guide)

And although having both tabaxi and Tabaxi in the canon of the Forgotten Realms is confusing, it makes sense for tabaxi to originate from Maztica. This provides the in-world explanation for the similarity of their names: the human Tabaxi named their tribe after the mysterious cat people of Maztica and Katashaka. Also, establishing them as native to that distant land explains why tabaxi are rare across Faerûn in both the past and present.

In *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, we wanted to provide more cultural detail for the tabaxi than they had been given in the past. In discussing the race, we hit upon the idea that their blank-slate status in most of D&D lore offered the opportunity to bring back the mysterious figure known as the Cat Lord. Originally appearing in the first edition AD&D *Monster Manual II*, the Cat Lord made some memorable later impressions—most notably in the Planescape campaign setting, but also in Greyhawk as a foil to Gary Gygax's Gord the Rogue (under the alias Rexfelis). The Cat Lord was portrayed as a mysterious and arch being of godlike power, who claimed lordship over all feline creatures. The Cat Lord is a charismatic character—there's just something inherently interesting about him—so bringing him back alongside the tabaxi offered many fun story opportunities.

Although *Fires of Zatal* states that the tabaxi worship Maztican gods, it also establishes that they do so in small tribal bands that remain largely separate. They also worship different Maztican gods based on which has the most influence over them at the time. So it's fair to say that in a setting like Maztica wherein the gods are very active and demanding, the tabaxi might worship any of them or the Cat Lord. Perhaps the Cat Lord even masquerades as a Maztican deity or as the “jaguar lords” mentioned in *Fires of Zatal*. Regardless, the canon

established in the Maztica products is over a century old, based on the in-world timeline. Also, the continents upon which that canon was established have been part of another world, Abeir, for most of that time. Who can say what's happened to Maztica and the tabaxi there over those many years? A tabaxi player character could, but . . .

“. . . no cat anywhere ever gave anyone a straight answer.”

—Peter S. Beagle, *The Last Unicorn*

If you want to do your own digging about the tabaxi, check out the following resources:

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/50012/Fiend-Folio-1e>

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/16782/Forgotten-Realms-Campaign-Set-1e>

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/16865/Monstrous-Manual-2e>

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/17279/Something-Wild-2e>

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/17298/Planes-of-Chaos-2e>

For Tabaxi with a capital T, check out:

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/16838/FRM1-The-Jungles-of-Chult-2e>

Tidbits about the Cat Lord can be found in a number of resources. Here are a few of the best:

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/17005/Monster-Manual-II-1e>

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/23683/Epic-Level-Handbook-3e>

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/17267/Planescape-Campaign-Setting-2e>

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/17278/Planes-of-Conflict-2e>

And for an unusual reference to the Cat Lord, check out the paka entry in the Ravenloft appendix of the *Monstrous Compendium*:

<http://www.dmsguild.com/product/17524/Monstrous-Compendium-Ravenloft-Appendix-III-2e>

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The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

We look into the DMs Guild to discover the secrets of the priestess by Jason Thompson.

Shawn Merwin



The *Dungeon Masters Guild* is the perfect place to showcase, share, and even sell your D&D creations. Whether it's a huge multipart campaign, a single dungeon crawl, or a brand-new character class or archetype, your work can be seen by thousands of D&D fans, as part of a growing archive of absorbing adventures and resources for players and Dungeon Masters.

Each issue of *Dragon+* highlights some of the very best of this content, and this month we've chosen *Priestess* by Jason Thompson.

Jason might be familiar to many *Dragon*+ readers as the creator of our walkthrough map comics, including for the “Against the Giants” adventures that started in issue 8. But he’s also been a player and DM for over thirty years, and has a wealth of experience running games and campaigns.

The priestess is an ancient-world divine class that is part cleric and part wizard. A priestess is heavily reliant on her idol, which contains a fragment of her chosen god, to enhance her powers. Designed to be used as a player character class, the priestess also comes with plenty of guidance on how to run members of the class as NPCs, making it one of the more detailed and interesting offerings we’ve found recently in the DM’s Guild. We caught up with Jason to learn more about the creation of this most totemic of classes.



Tell us about your background. How did you first get into D&D?
I first got the D&D *Basic Set* as a birthday gift when I was eight

years old. I didn't quite get it at first, but then my babysitter ran a game for me and a friend, and I understood that it was basically just 'make-believe with dice' and I loved it. After that, I couldn't find any other Dungeon Masters in my elementary school, so I started DMing a game for my friends.

What kind of DM are you? Do you have any tips for prospective DMs?

I've always been into ancient historical fantasy. I ran an Egyptian D&D campaign years ago, and now our campaign is set in ancient Babylon, with D&D races and classes, of course. When I'm DMing or playing, I like a sandbox feel, where the player characters can go anywhere and do anything. But I also realize this kind of game can lead to the players not being sure what to do, so I try to balance that by having an overarching plot in the background. As a DM, I'm always trying to learn and to make sure everyone has a good time.

The priestess is an intriguing combination of cleric and wizard. What prompted you to create this divine core class?

Wizards and clerics are my favorite classes as a player. The priestess combines the heavy spellcasting ability of a wizard with the divine theme of a cleric. In return, the class trades in some of a cleric's armor and weapon proficiencies. In fantasy fiction, there are often "high priest" types of characters who aren't so good in melee but who have strong mystical abilities, and this is what the priestess is based on.

There seem to be a lot of different priestess play styles. Can you tell us how those work?

The kind of priestess you play is based on two choices. First, like a cleric, you decide which deity you serve and what domains that deity has. Second, unlike a cleric, a priestess carries a magic idol that has a personality—an Idol Aspect—determining how the priestess worships it. There are five different Idol Aspects: Resplendent, Praisehungry, Ecstatic, Mortifying, and Bloodthirsty. So you might be a very benign priestess, serving a resplendent deity of life, or a very aggressive priestess, serving a bloodthirsty god of war. Or even a resplendent god of war, for a more unusual combination.

A priestess's idol is a key component of her identity. How do the idol's mechanics work?



A priestess's idol is like a wizard's spellbook, so that priestesses use their idols to regain their spells and access other powers. Idols contain a fragment of the essence of the priestess's deity, but they're also sort of like intelligent magic items, and they appreciate being worshipped in certain ways. For instance, a Praisehungry idol likes prayers and songs. An Ecstatic idol likes dances and strenuous physical activity. Mortifying idols like their priestesses to punish themselves and live within various rigid restrictions. A Resplendent idol likes gifts of flowers, incense, food, and treasure. And of course, a Bloodthirsty idol likes blood sacrifices, which makes them excellent for neutral or evil player characters!

In combat, as a bonus action or an action depending on the Idol Aspect, you can perform a special kind of prayer to gain Divine Boons, which let you regain expended spell slots and use other powers. I've noticed it's fairly common in D&D for clerics and paladins to pray to their deity for help in a pinch; the priestess class gives that a mechanical in-game incentive. Also, at 2nd level, priestesses gain the ability to let other player characters join them in worship to gain various benefits, making the priestess a great support character.



Can you tell us more about Divine Boons and some of the new spells you've created?

The priestess's spell list is a little like the cleric's, but it includes some traditional wizard spells as well, especially enchantments and illusions, and new spells like *heaven's thunder* (an area attack that targets nonprone creatures). In addition to regaining spell slots, you can use Divine Boons to bring your idol to life as a golem-like monster, enlarge the area of a spell effect so that it fills an entire temple (or a city at 20th level), or perform other actions.

As you rise in levels, you also develop Enhanced Idol abilities, which are based on your Idol Aspect and domains. For instance, if you have the Tempest domain, you can choose Idol of Wind and Rain, which lets you control the weather if your idol is nearby, or Idol of Thunderbolts, which gives you resistance to lightning damage and adds various lightning and thunder spells to your priestess spell list.

If you have the Nature domain, you can choose Idol of the Wilderness, which allows you to charm animals with your idol, or Wrath of Artemis, which lets you polymorph NPCs into animals. There are also new spells and two new domains to go along with them: the Sea domain, which has fish- and water-related powers, and the Fertility domain, which has plant-related powers.

What are some of the most useful or demanding aspects of playing a priestess? What kinds of players will enjoy the priestess class?

A priestess fills a role in an adventuring party similar to a cleric, but has more spells and more flexibility in determining how those spells are used. It's a class for players who like tinkering with different spell effects, being a leader type, or roleplaying service to a deity in the campaign world. The biggest challenge (and roleplaying hook) of the class is maintaining access to your idol. As you go up in levels, your idol gets bigger and heavier, from a Tiny idol at 1st level up to a Huge idol at 17th level, so that high-level priestesses might need to use horses, wagons, or NPC servants to move their idols from place to place. Thankfully, if your idol is damaged or broken, you can repair it with magic, and at higher levels, you can also use powers to bring your idol to life and just have it walk around.



You've also introduced rules for using priestesses as NPCs. How do you see them working in existing campaigns?

The PDF includes five sample priestesses statted out as NPCs from CR 2 to 10. The lower-level priestesses—the Priestess of War and the Priestess of Trickery—could be allies or enemies the PCs meet on the road. The higher-level ones—the High Priestess of Fertility, the Supreme Priestess of Death, and the Ultimate Priestess of Fire—are potential boss enemies if the players are fighting a cult or exploring a temple. They're also included to give examples of how to make a priestess character and what kind of roles and powers they can have.

How has the priestess been received by your players?

One of my players, Shanti, has been playing a priestess since the

beginning of our Babylon campaign! He's given me a lot of great feedback. The other players were really shocked the first time Shanti's character sacrificed a defeated bandit to his idol, or when another NPC tried to touch the idol without permission and got zapped backwards with fire damage.

What have been the most interesting and challenging aspects of designing a character class?

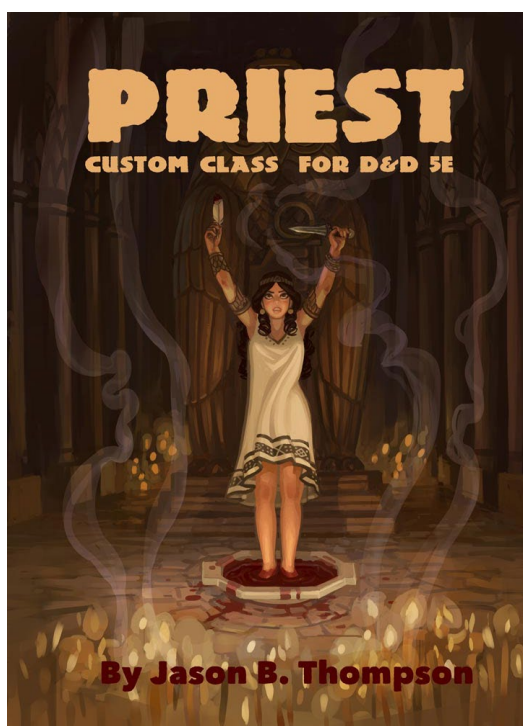
My ideas are based on what I think is exciting or flavorful, and then I work backwards to come up with game rules based on that. Making sure everything is balanced is a constant challenge of testing and revisions. For the priestess specifically, I was also inspired by fighting games, with the idea that you can pull off various combos and chain effects by using your priestess together with your idol.

You've also created the interior artwork for the book, including one piece that references the classic idol from the AD&D *Player's Handbook* cover. Tell us about your own style and how you approach creating D&D art?

The cover art is by **Konstantin Pogorelov**, a great artist and one of the players in our campaign. I drew the interior art; for our campaign, I often draw portraits of the NPCs the players meet, as well as maps and other things. My art—which you can see **on my website** and on **Instagram**—is inspired by a combination of manga, indie comics, and science fiction/fantasy illustrators such as Erol Otus, Ian Miller, and Sidney Sime.

You're also well known for drawing some of our D&D walkthrough maps, including maps of the classic AD&D G-series giant adventures for *Dragon+*. Tell us a little about their creation.

I love drawing the walkthrough maps! The first one I did was for *Tomb of Horrors* in 2013, and since then, I've drawn maps for many classic D&D adventures, as well as current adventures such as *Out of the Abyss*, *Curse of Strahd*, and *Storm King's Thunder*. It's



really fun to draw the dungeons or sites in 3D and then also come up with the path the adventurers take through them. It's a little bit like drawing a traditional comic, but instead of the action happening in panels, it happens in the different rooms of the dungeon. Since everything is very small, I draw the maps in a more cartoony style using stick figures, which is fine by me because it lets me focus on drawing the monsters and landscapes and all the little background details.

What other projects have you got going forward?

I've written a priestess expansion with new types of idols and spells, which I might put on DMs Guild depending on the reaction to the *Priestess*. Beyond that, there's a site-based adventure I'm working on, but I'm just waiting to see how my players handle it before I write it up. And our tabletop game *Mangaka: The Fast & Furious Game of Drawing Comics* just came out, so I'm really excited about that! I post lots of shots of what I'm working on at both my [website](#) and on [Twitter](#), so please follow me and check it out!

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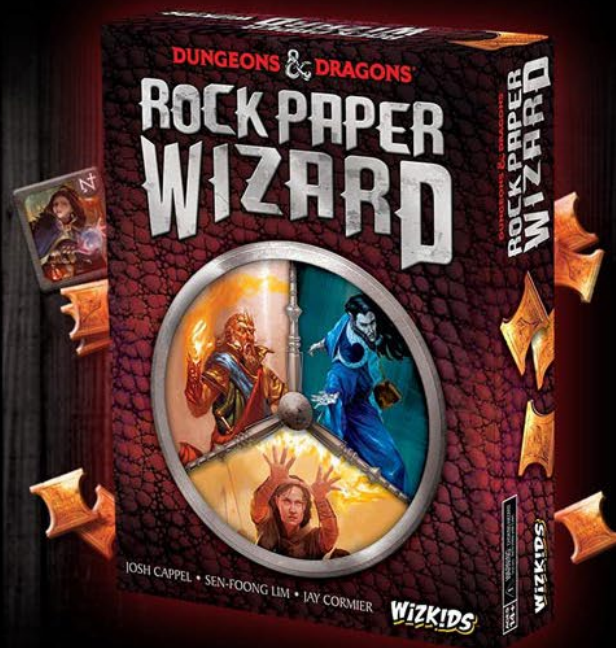
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D&D Classics: Great Stoney

From the Dragon archives, a grand tour of Great Stoney

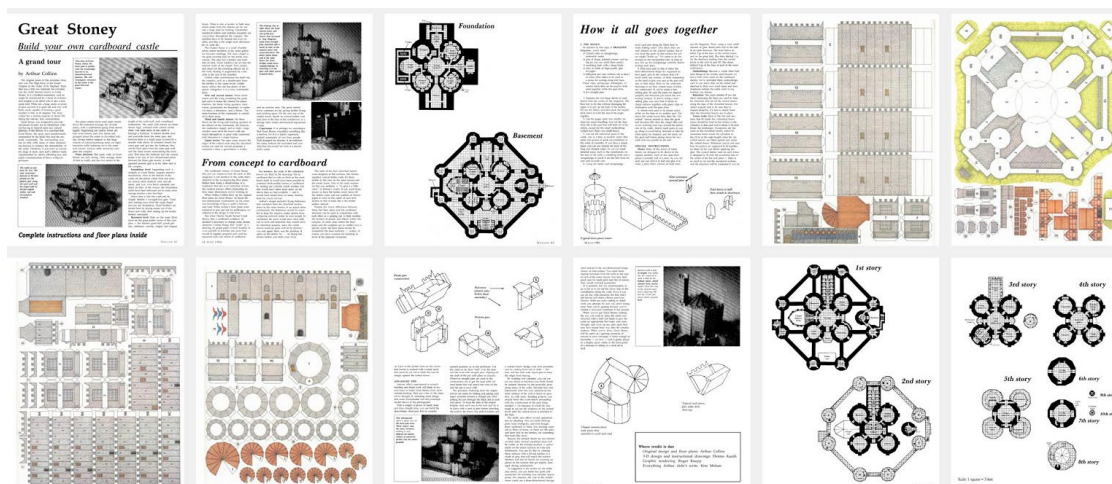
ARTHUR COLLINS

In last issue's "**Welcome**" column, we heaped much praise upon *Dragon* magazine's issue 86. Mentioned in passing in that article was the paper craft castle known as Great Stoney. Here's a description from Arthur Collins's original article of June 1984:

The original name of this awesome structure was the High Keep of the Grand Chapter of the Order of St. Raphael. Since that was a little too elaborate for everyday use, the castle became known as Great Stoney. It is a fortified monastery, such as might be maintained by a band of ecclesiastical knights or an abbot who is also a temporal lord. While not a large castle in terms of area covered, it is quite tall and very well built, easily capable of housing a great number of folk of all degrees.

GREAT STONEY

Considering this issue's emphasis on crafting and DIY, we thought it appropriate to take a look back at Great Stoney, offering a PDF download of the original article and its 3D paper craft plans. We suggest printing the plans onto light card stock and constructing the castle yourself. In fact, we'd very much like to see your results, so show them to us here on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



(Select to view)

Where Credit is Due:

Original design and floor plans: Arthur Collins

3D design and instructional drawings: Dennis Kauth

Graphic rendering: Roger Raupp

Everything Arthur didn't write: Kim Mohan

Digital scanning for *Dragon+*: Jefferson Dunlap

[Download](#)

Postscript

In coming issues of *Dragon+*, we'll continue to look back into the vast trove of *Dragon* magazine back issues to present some favorite pieces from years past. Though the rules and editions of D&D have changed over the years, there's still much to be savored from nearly four decades of *Dragon*. If there are particular articles or content that you would like to see republished in a future issue of *Dragon+*, please [let us know!](#)



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Great Stoney

Build your own cardboard castle

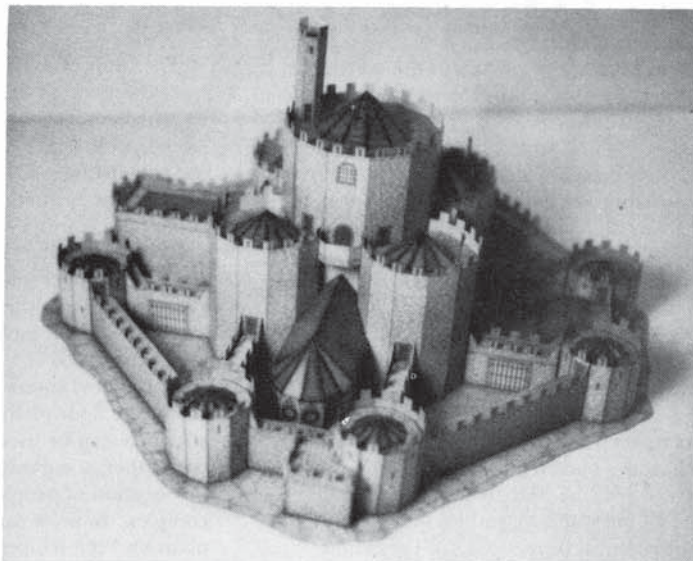
A grand tour

by Arthur Collins

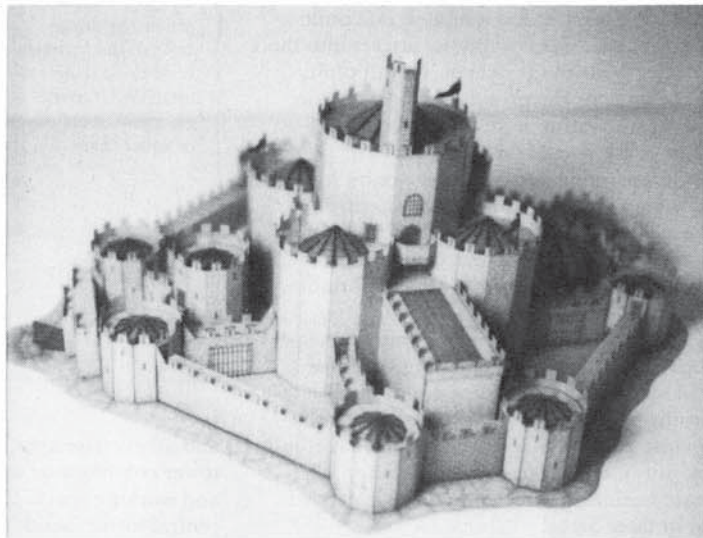
The original name of this awesome structure was The High Keep of the Grand Chapter of the Order of St. Raphael. Since that was a little too elaborate for everyday use, the castle became known as Great Stoney. It is a fortified monastery, such as might be maintained by a band of ecclesiastical knights or an abbot who is also a temporal lord. While not a large castle in terms of area covered, it is quite tall and very well built, easily capable of housing a great number of folk of all degrees. The main chapel has a seating capacity of about 330, taking the balcony into consideration.

Great Stoney was designed to provide maximum security for its inhabitants without having to depend upon any natural defenses of the terrain. It is assumed that Great Stoney sits upon open meadowlands, surrounded by the fields that feed the monastic community. The surrounding area has no hills, cliffs, lakes, or other outstanding features to enhance the defendability of the castle. Therefore, it was built as concentric rings of stone, each part's defense easily supplemented by others, affording easy and rapid communication of forces within its perimeter.

The castle as seen from the rear. The most prominent features in the foreground are the postern gate along the outer wall and the chapel with its sharply angled timber roof and stained-glass windows.



This view of Great Stoney shows the main gate in profile, with the drawbridge lowered to an almost-horizontal position. The tall rectangular structure in the center is the great hall and cloister.



The great central tower rises eight stories (from the basement through the seventh story), with a watchtower going three stories higher. Supporting the central tower are four more towers, each five stories tall, grouped about the center in cloverleaf fashion. Giving further support to this huge volume of outward-pressing stone are eight two-story walls radiating out to the outer wall towers. Various other structures complete the complex.

Outer defenses: The outer walls of Great Stoney are very strong. They average about 10 feet in width, and rise two stories to the

height of the walk-wall, with crenellated battlements. The outer wall towers are three stories high, crowned with conical timber roofs. The main entry to the castle is through a barbican. A barred double door and portcullis form the outer gate, and between them is a small space covered by a murder hole above. If intruders breach the outer gate and get into the barbican, they can be fired upon from the outer gate wall and the three towers surrounding the entry area. Exit from the barbican into the central bailey is by way of two normal-sized doors between the three gate towers. A well-guarded postern gate is at the other end of the complex.

Foundation level: Supporting such a rockpile as Great Stoney requires massive foundations. Here in the bowels of the castle are the places where food and arms are stored, meat smoked, wine and ale made, and (yes, even here) criminals confined. In three of the towers, the foundation walls have been hollowed out to make extra storage hatches a few feet high.

Down here is also the crypt and its chapel, behind a wrought-iron gate. Corridors leading away from the crypt chapel traverse the foundation. Dead brothers are buried here by prying stones out of the floors and walls, then sealing up the bodies behind cenotaphs.

Basement level: Here on the main (first) level are the great public rooms of the complex — the kitchen, great hall, grand gallery, infirmary, sacristy, chapel, and chapter

Complete instructions and floor plans inside

house. There is also a lavabo, or bath area, where water from the cisterns can be run into a large pool for bathing. Garderobes (medieval toilets) and middens (cesspits) are everywhere throughout the complex. The middens have to be cleaned out every so often, and this is the single most obnoxious job of castle life.

The chapter house is a small chamber where senior members of the order gather for business meetings. The main chapel is the great worship area for the whole community. The altar has a hidden safe built into its back. Great windows are set into the exterior walls of the chapel. Font, pulpit, and chairs for the presiding officers are in the front. Seating is augmented by a balcony in the rear of the chamber.

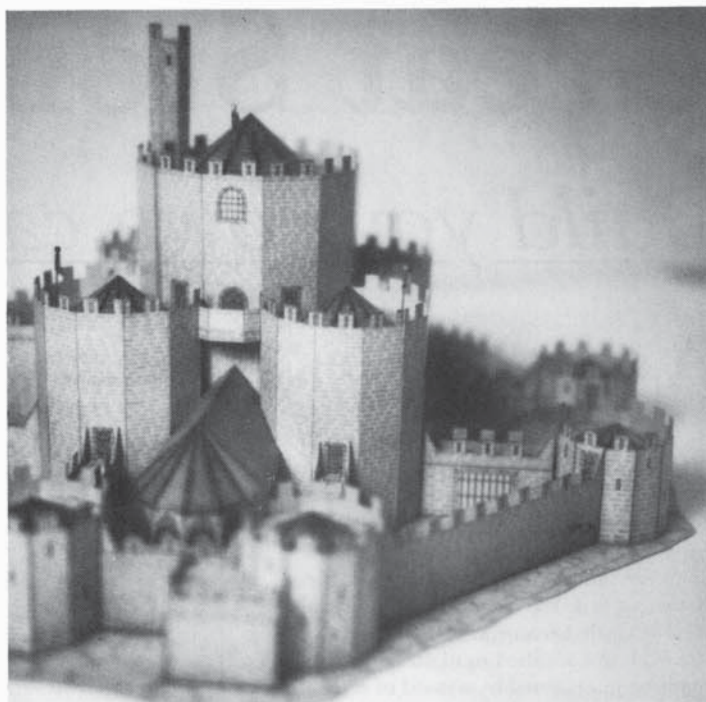
Certain other conveniences are built into the complex, such as a dumbwaiter from the kitchen to the upper levels. Unlike many castles, this one has plenty of fireplaces. Altogether, it is a very comfortable place.

First and second stories: These tower rooms and the wing containing the great hall serve to house the cloister for junior brothers, the better living quarters, classrooms, guestrooms for hospitality (a medieval duty), a laboratory, and a library. The main business of the community is carried on in these areas.

Third and fourth stories: On these floors are the living and working quarters of the officers of the community, the treasury, the meditation chapel, and so forth. Large window seats set in the tower walls are found throughout. A great solar (sunroom) with balconies is a major feature.

Upper levels: The open areas around the edges of the conical roofs atop the cloverleaf towers are used for various purposes: a carpenter's shop, a greenhouse, a smithy,

The closeup view at right shows the large central tower and two of the four towers that surround it. Atop flagpoles made from straight pins, pennants add a touch of color to the massive stone and wood structure. The detail photo below and to the right shows the drawbridge, made more realistic-looking by attaching it to the gate with short pieces of small chain.



and an exercise area. The great central tower continues on up, giving further living and working space. On the very top of the central tower, beside its conical timber roof and close to the base of the watchtower, is a storage shed where astronomical equipment is kept.

Conclusion: It is perhaps no coincidence that Great Stoney resembles something like a beehive, for it is a tightly organized, packed community of very busy people. Well designed for defense, it nevertheless has many features for recreation and worship that one would not find in a secular lord's castle.



From concept to cardboard

The cardboard version of Great Stoney that you can construct from the parts in this magazine is not identical to the castle that's depicted in the accompanying floor plans. Rather than being a disadvantage or a weakness, that fact is an indication of how the creation process differs depending on how many dimensions you're working in.

When Arthur Collins drew up his original floor plans for Great Stoney, he based the two-dimensional construction on his extensive knowledge of how a castle is laid out and built. When Arthur's floor plans were rendered in pen and ink for publication, we adhered to the design in that form.

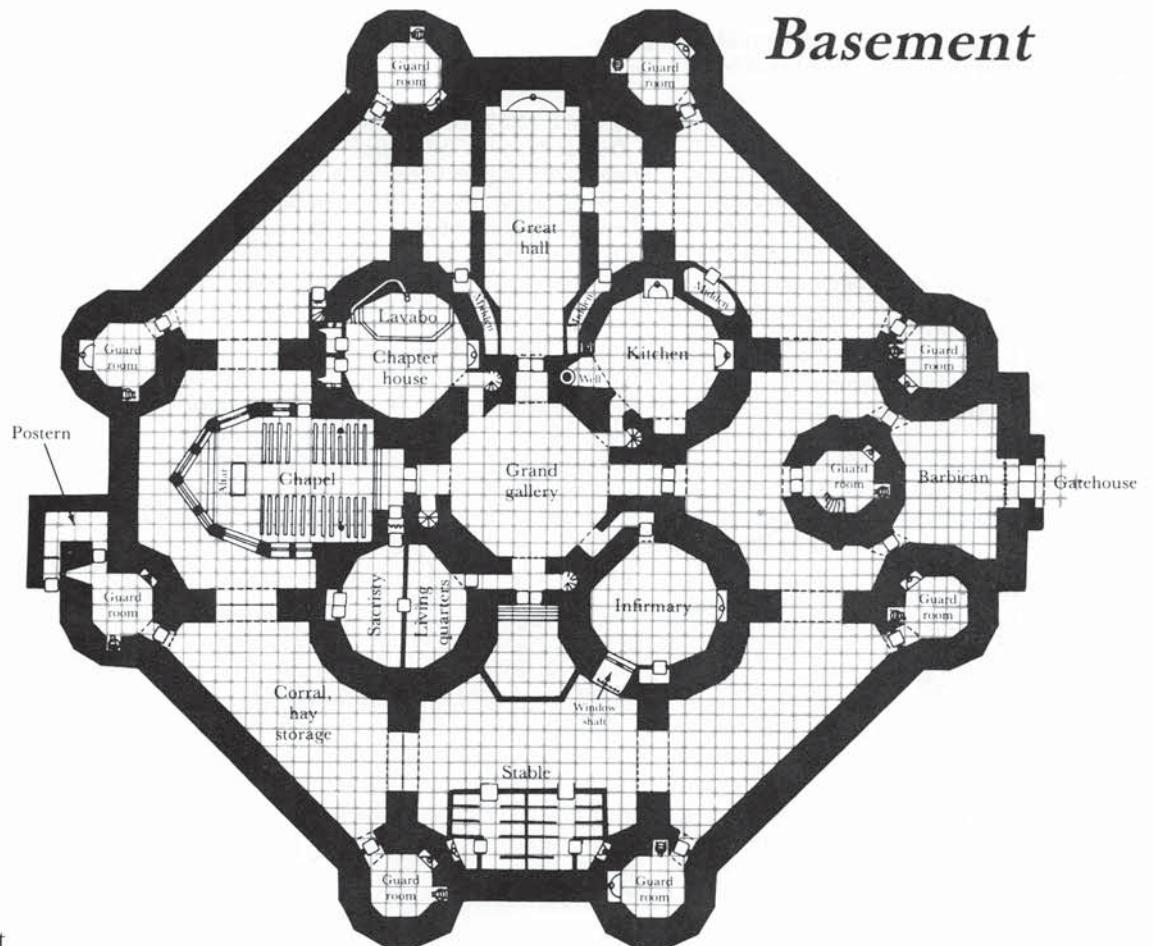
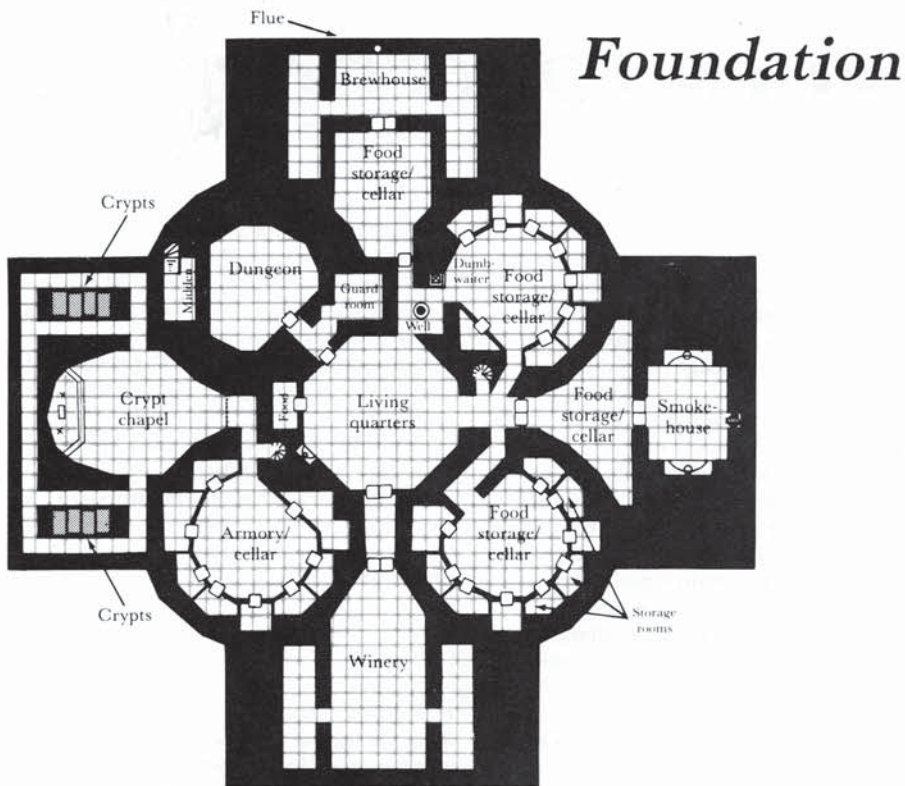
But when Dennis Kauth turned Great Stoney into a cardboard sculpture, he deemed it necessary to change some design elements. Certain things that "work" in a drawing on graph paper weren't feasible or even possible to translate into parts that would fit together properly and could be squeezed onto four sheets of cardboard.

For instance, the walls of the cylindrical towers are thick in the drawings, but in cardboard they're only as thick as the cardboard itself. It would have been possible to construct thick-walled towers in cardboard by nesting one cylinder inside another, but that would have taken more space on the sheets than we had available — and it would have meant twice as many crenellations for you to cut out.

Arthur's design included flying buttresses that extended from the cloverleaf section down to the outer towers. In an actual stone construction, the buttresses would be essential to keep the massive center section from collapsing outward under its own weight. In cardboard, the parts would have been difficult to form and assemble; they would serve no structural purpose, since the center towers stand up quite well all by themselves; and again, there was the problem of space on the sheets. So . . . no flying buttresses (unless you make your own).

The roofs of the four cloverleaf towers were designed as flat surfaces, but Dennis supplied conical timber roofs for them similar to the ones on the outer towers and the center tower. One of the main reasons for this was aesthetic — "to give it a little color," in Dennis's words. If you want those towers to have flat timber roofs, leave off the timber cones and use markers or brown paper to color in the center of each roof section so that it looks like a flat timber surface instead.

Despite the minor differences between them, the floor plans and the cardboard structure can be used in conjunction with each other as a gaming aid, to help monitor the location of people and objects within the complex. In most cases where the floor plans and the sculpture are in conflict over a specific point, the floor plans should be considered the final authority — unless, of course, you have a reason for deciding in favor of the opposite viewpoint.



Scale: 1 square = 5 feet

How it all goes together

I. THE BASICS

In addition to this copy of DRAGON® Magazine, you'll need:

- A 12-inch ruler or straightedge, preferably metal.
- A pair of sharp, pointed scissors, not too big (so you can wield them easily).
- A modeling knife with a sharp blade.
- A tube or bottle of high-quality glue for paper.
- A ball-point pen (one without ink is okay) or some other object to be used as a stylus for scoring along fold lines.
- Paper clips, spring-type clothespins, or similar items that can be used to hold parts together while the glue dries.
- A few straight pins.

1. Separate the two large sheets of cardboard from the center of the magazine. The best way to do this without damaging the paper is to pry up the ends of the staples, lift out the sheets, and then push the staples back down to hold the rest of the pages together.

2. Cut the pages apart into smaller sections for easier handling. Cut out the base first; this is the part that will hold all of the others, except for the small outbuildings (which have their own small bases).

3. Cut out the individual parts of the castle, one at a time as needed; notice that parts and groups of parts are numbered in the order of assembly. If you have a steady hand, you can use scissors for most of the long and straight edges. To cut out small detailed areas, such as the crenellations on the tops of the walls, a modeling knife and a straightedge to guide it are the best tools for true and accurate cuts.

4. Using the stylus and straightedge,

score each part along the black lines to make folding easier. (The black lines are only printed on the colored surface, but if you score the parts on that surface the colors might "break up." It's safest to do the scoring on the non-printed side, as long as you line up the straightedge carefully before scoring each line.)

5. Fold each part so that it forms the three-dimensional shape it's supposed to, then apply glue to the surfaces that will touch (only one surface, or both, depending on the kind of glue you use) so the part will stay in that shape. Refer to the schematic drawings to see how certain types of parts are constructed. If you're using a fast-setting glue, be sure the parts are aligned properly the first time you touch the connecting surfaces. If you're using a slow-setting glue, you may find it handy to clamp surfaces together with paper clips or clothespins until the glue dries.

6. Attach each part in its proper place, either on the base or on another part. Put down the center tower first, then the "cloverleaf" towers around it, then the great hall (location #3), then the chapel (#4) and so on, working your way toward the perimeter of the castle. Attach small parts as you go along to avoid being hemmed in later by other parts; for instance, put the doors on the great hall before gluing down the two walls that run parallel to the hall.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

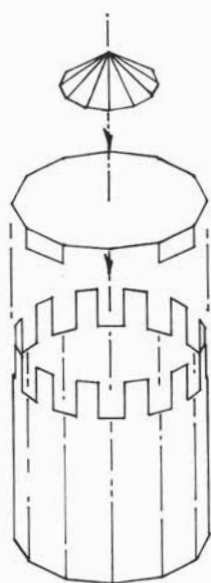
Doors: Many of the doors of Great Stoney are designed to be shown in the opened position. Each of the open-door pieces is actually half of a door. As you cut each one out, fold it in half and glue it to make a piece that's colored on both sides

(see the diagram). Then, using a very small amount of glue, attach each half to the side of an open doorway. The door halves labeled 3 go at the base of the central tower and on the great hall. The door labeled 1 is for the doorway leading from the central tower to the roof of part #5. The doors labeled 9 go at the base of each of the outer wall towers.

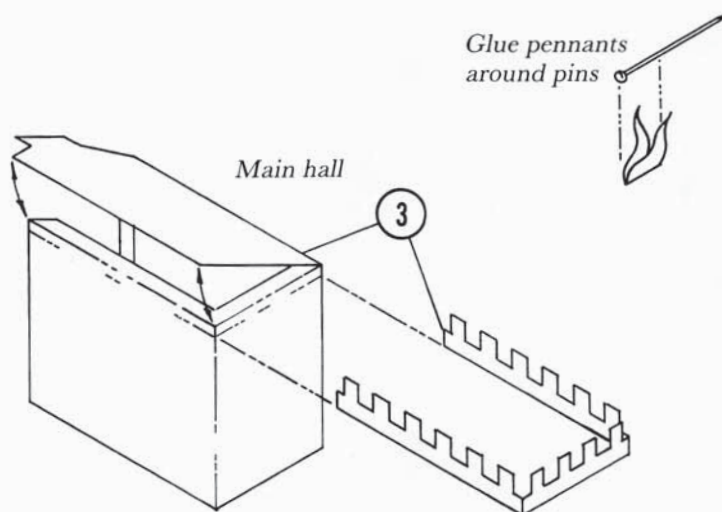
Outbuildings: Because a castle often had such things in its vicinity (and because we had a little extra room on the cardboard sheets), we've provided three outbuildings, each in one piece, that can be folded and attached to their own small bases and then displayed outside the castle walls in any location you choose.

Balconies: The parts labeled B (on the sheet containing the base) are used to form the balconies that jut off the central tower along the tops of the cloverleaf towers. For added support and to be sure they're aligned properly, it's best to attach them after the cloverleaf towers are in place.

Tower roofs: Most of the flat roof sections that fit inside the cylindrical tower pieces should be fixed to the insides of the cylinders so that each roof is about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch below the battlement. Exceptions are the roofs on the cloverleaf towers, which fit somewhat lower inside the cylinders so they'll be at the right height when the cloverleaf towers are fitted against and under the central tower. Whenever you're not sure how two pieces are supposed to fit together, try them on for size before applying any glue. The conical timber roof on each tower is designed to fit over the uncolored area in the center of the flat roof piece — there is no need to cut out the uncolored sections, and the structure will be weakened if you do

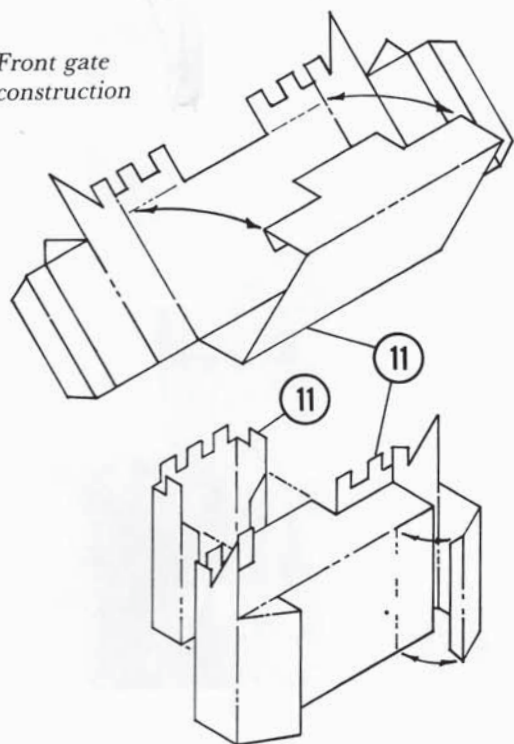


Typical three-piece tower

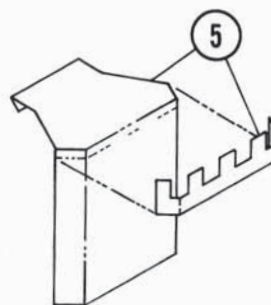


Fold doors in half, then attach to doorways

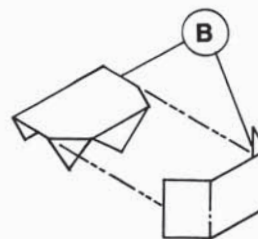
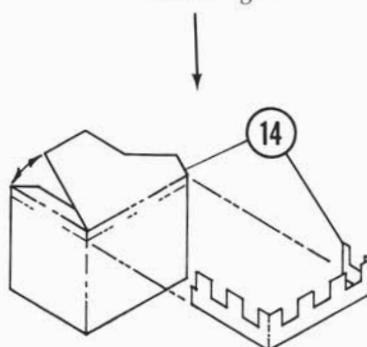
Front gate construction



Balconies
(attach sides
before final
assembly)



Postern gate



so. Each of the timber roofs on the clover-leaf towers is marked with a small notch that must be cut out to make the roof fit snugly against the central tower.

ADVANCED TIPS

Anyone who's experienced at scratch-building and detail work will think of several ways to make Great Stoney even more realistic-looking. Here are a few of the ideas we've thought of, including some things that were incorporated into the prototype model shown in the photographs.

With a couple of pieces of small chain and four straight pins, you can build the drawbridge (door part #11) in a partly

opened position, as in the prototype. Cut the chain to fit, then "bolt" it to the door and the wall with straight pins, clipping off the shaft of the pin with pliers or scissors. Wherever straight pins are used in the construction, try to get the type with colored heads that will match the color of the part the pin is used with.

The pennants fluttering from the higher towers are made by folding and gluing each paper pennant around a straight pin, then poking the pin through the black dot in each roof piece. To keep the pins at the proper heights, stick each one in the roof and fix it in place with a spot of glue before attaching the roof to the tower. For added realism and

a custom touch, design your own pennants, and try cutting them out of cloth — but first, seal the cloth with liquid glue to keep the edges from fraying.

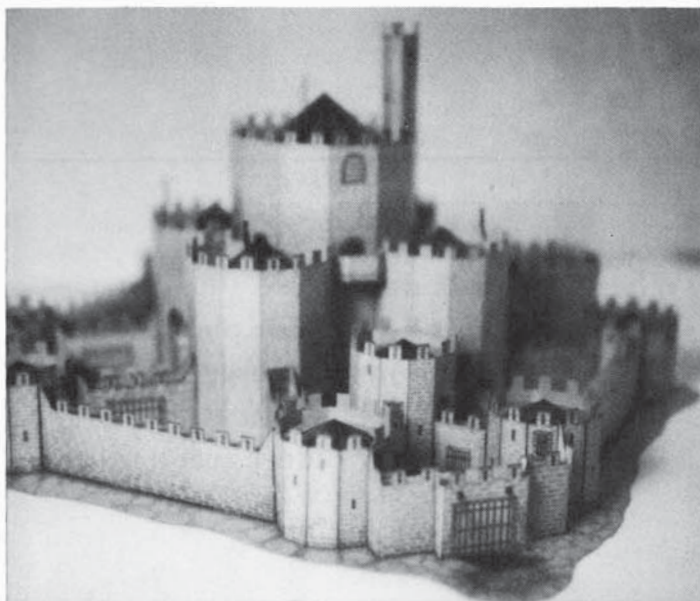
By working very carefully, you can cut out any doors or windows you think should be opened; likewise for the portcullis gates along many of the walls. Simulate bars and latticework with thin wire attached to the inner surfaces of the wall or tower in question. As with many detailing projects, you should finish this work before proceeding with the construction of the part being detailed — for instance, it would be very tough to cut out the windows on the central tower after the central tower is attached to the base.

The stable area offers several opportunities for detailing. You can build hitching posts from toothpicks, and feed troughs from cardboard or balsa. Use flocking material or fibers of twine, or check out the spice and herb rack in the kitchen, for something that looks like straw.

Because the printed sheets are not colored on both sides, several uncolored areas will be visible on the finished product — particularly on the inside surfaces of walls and battlements. You can fix this by coloring those surfaces with a felt-tip marker in a shade of gray that will match the exterior. Markers will also be handy for covering up places on the exterior that get slightly damaged during construction.

As suggested in the section on the stable area above, you can build new parts and accessories for anything you consider appropriate. For instance, the roof of the central tower could use a three-dimensional storage

This photograph offers a good view of the main gate area. Three towers ring the main entrance, making it very difficult for hostile visitors to penetrate further into the castle grounds.

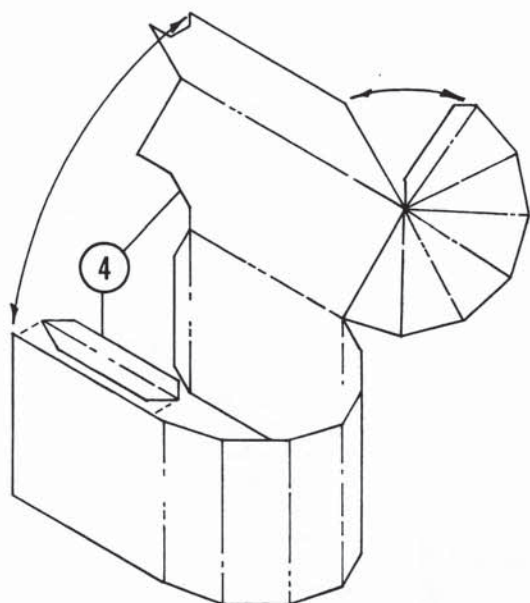


shed instead of the two-dimensional image shown on that surface. You could build sloping staircases from the walls to the tops of each of the outer towers. You may find good uses for small parts and bits of scenery from model railroad accessories.

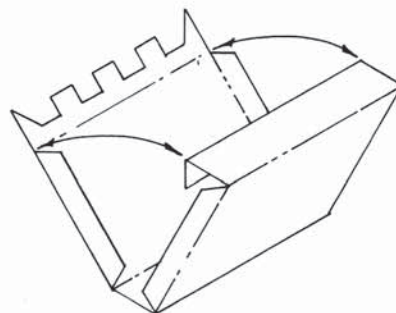
It is possible, but not recommended, to go so far as to cut out the arrow slits on the crenellations along the walls. Even if you can do this with precision, the hole that's left behind will make a flimsy part even flimsier. With any extra cutting or detail work you attempt, be sure you aren't losing more than you're gaining because you've created a structural weakness in the process.

When you've got Great Stoney looking the way you want it, spray the entire construction with a dull coat finish to give the castle an appropriate flat luster, add some strength, and cover up any glue spots that may have found their way onto the exterior surfaces. When you're done, Great Stoney will be useful as a gaming accessory (if anyone in your campaign is lucky enough to encounter — or own — such a grand place) or a display piece, either as the focal point of a diorama or sitting on a shelf all by itself.

Anyone with a fear of heights was probably not required to work a shift in the lookout tower, which extends three stories higher than the roof of the central tower and a dizzying 165 feet (at 15 feet per story) above ground level.



*Chapel construction;
note piece that
attaches to wall and roof*

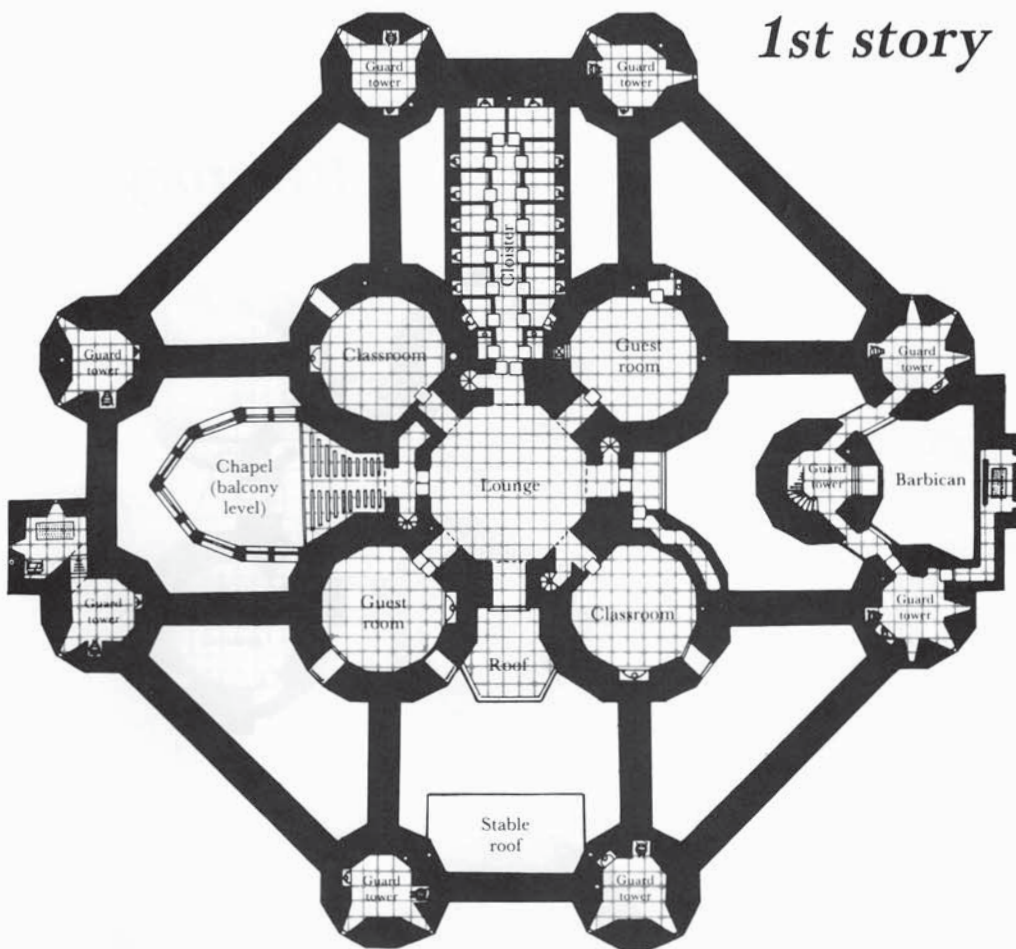


*Typical wall piece;
glue sides first,
then top*

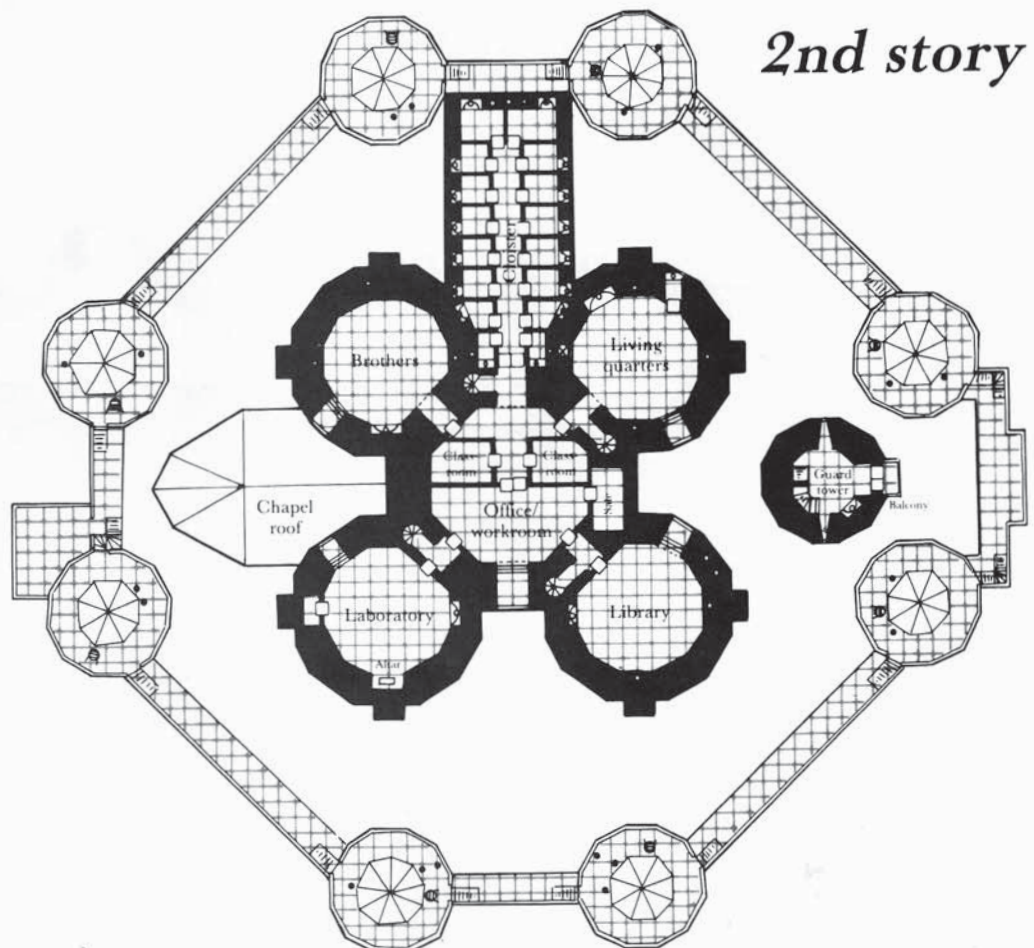
Where credit is due

Original design and floor plans: Arthur Collins
3-D design and instructional drawings: Dennis Kauth
Graphic rendering: Roger Raupp
Everything Arthur didn't write: Kim Mohan

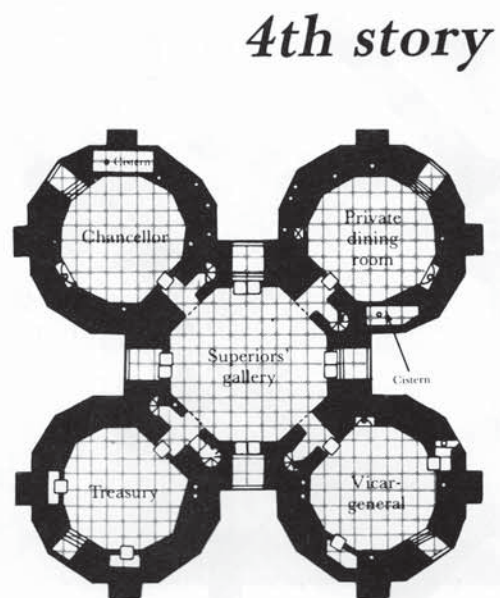
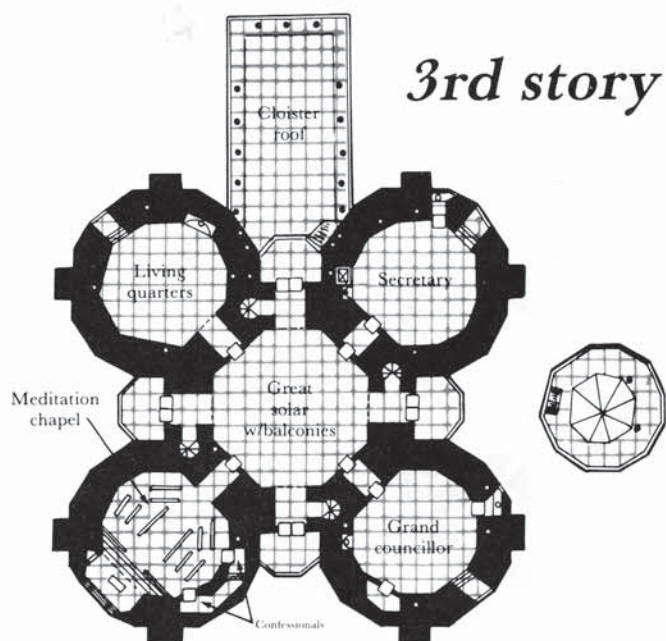
1st story



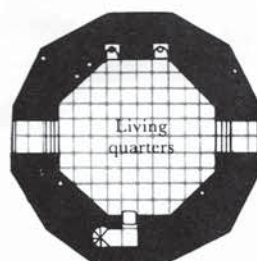
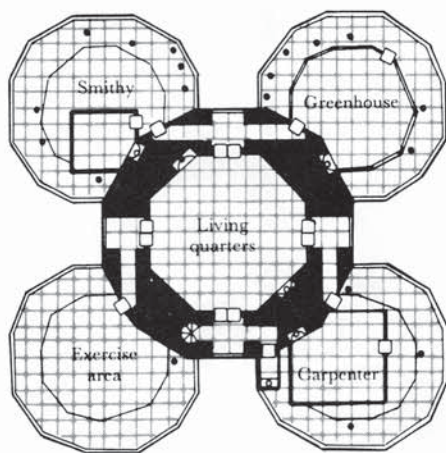
2nd story



Scale: 1 square = 5 feet



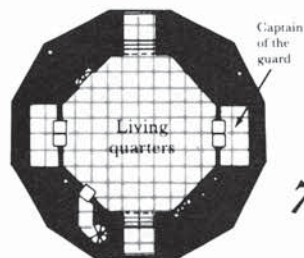
5th story



6th story



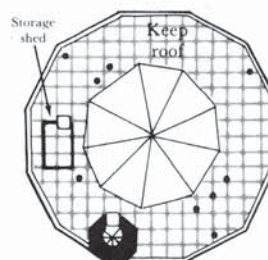
9th story



7th story

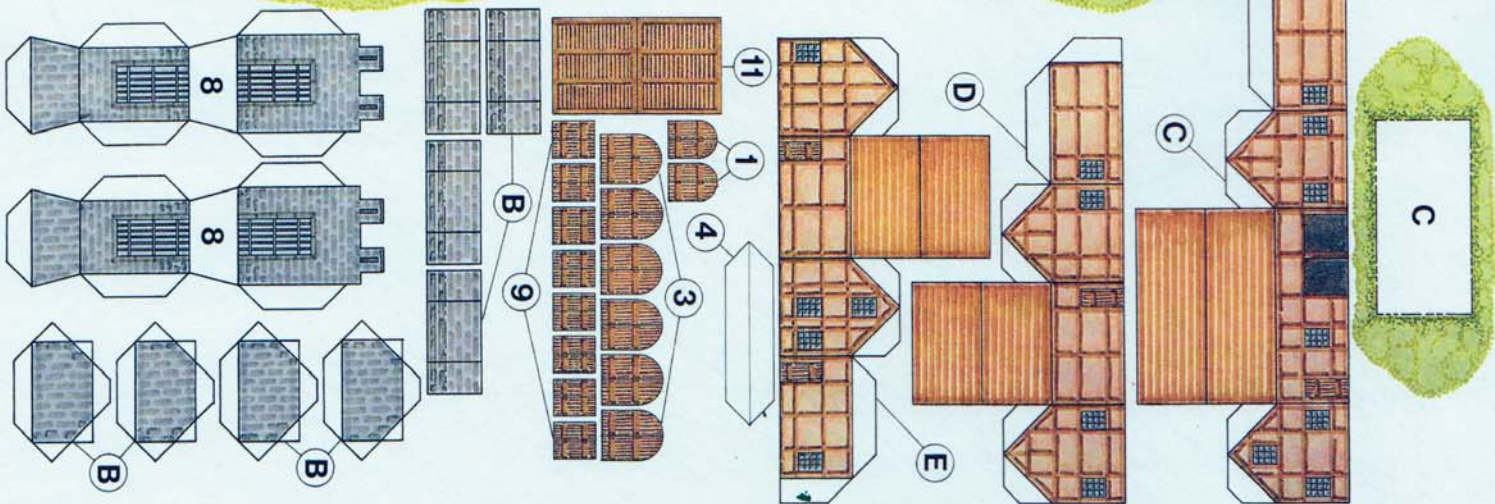
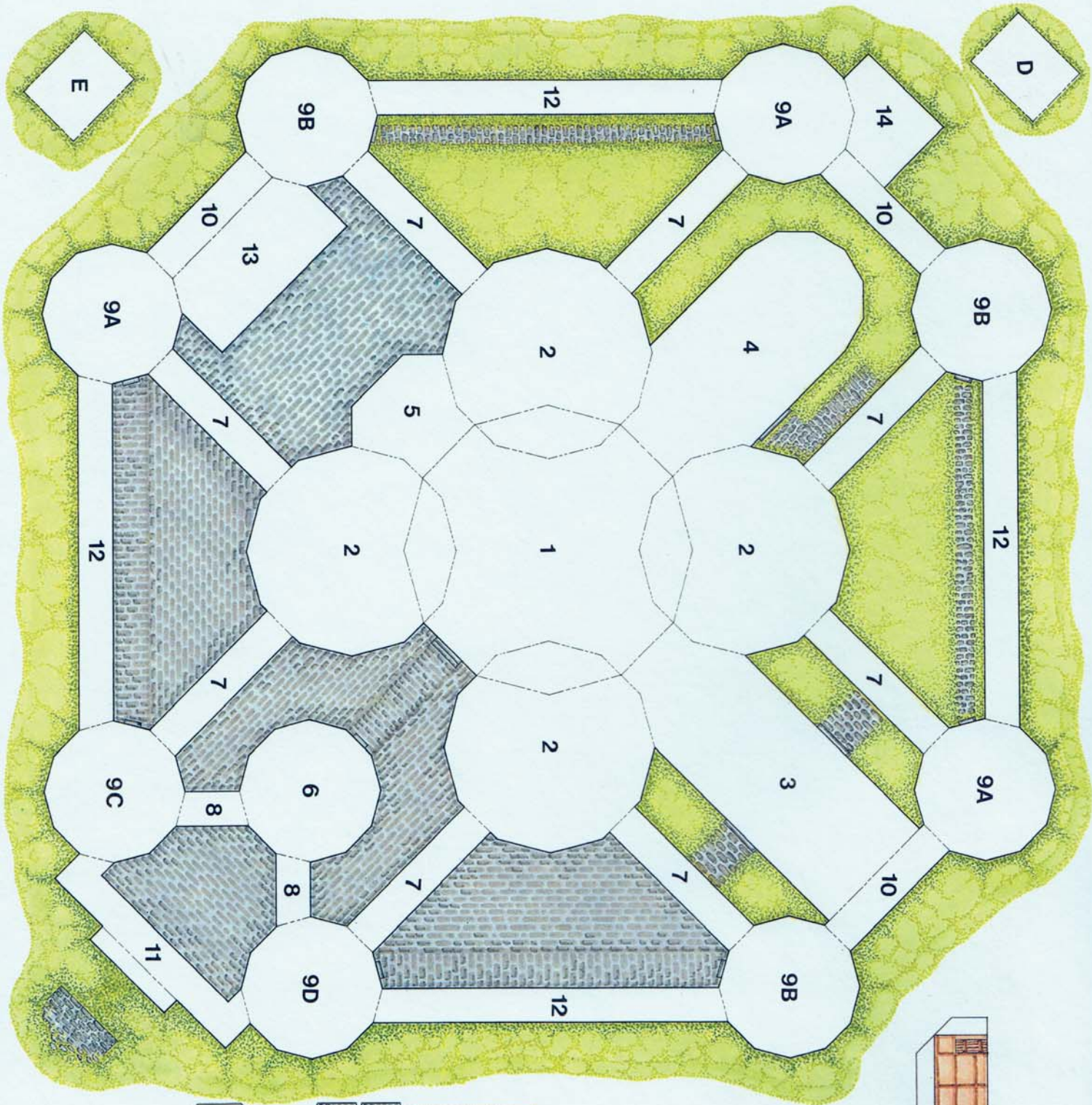


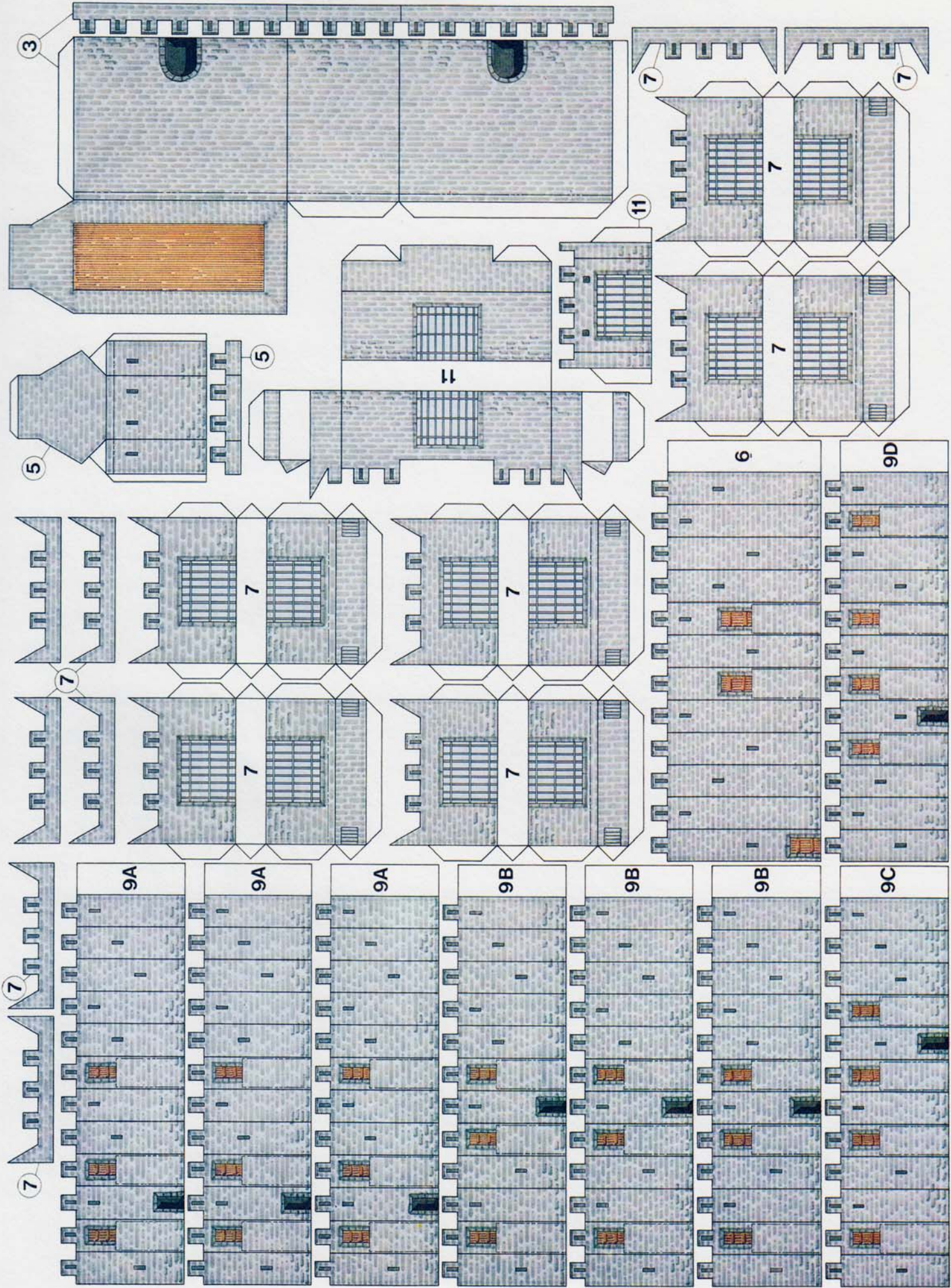
10th story

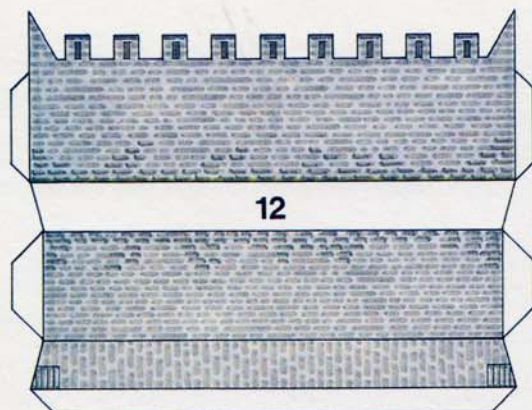


8th story

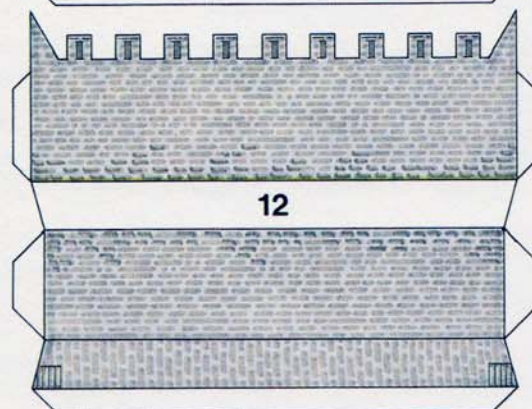
Scale: 1 square = 5 feet



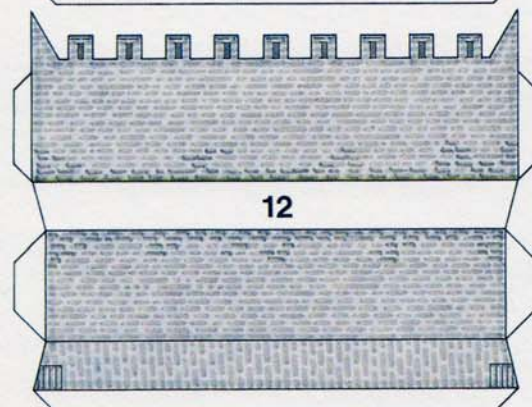




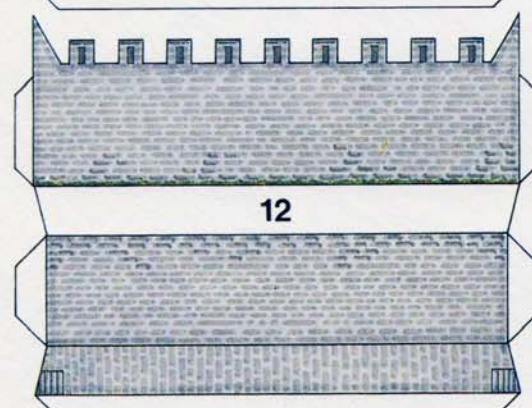
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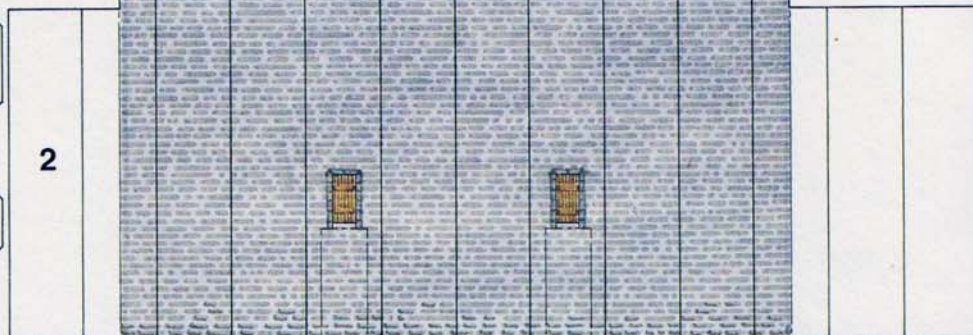
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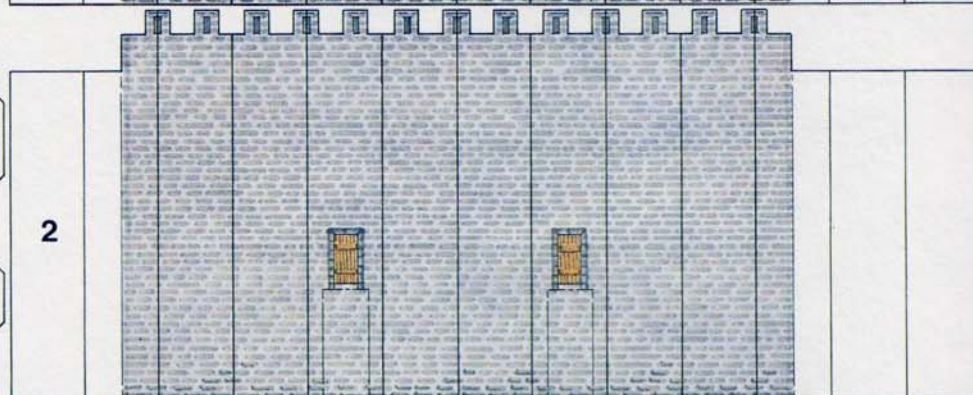
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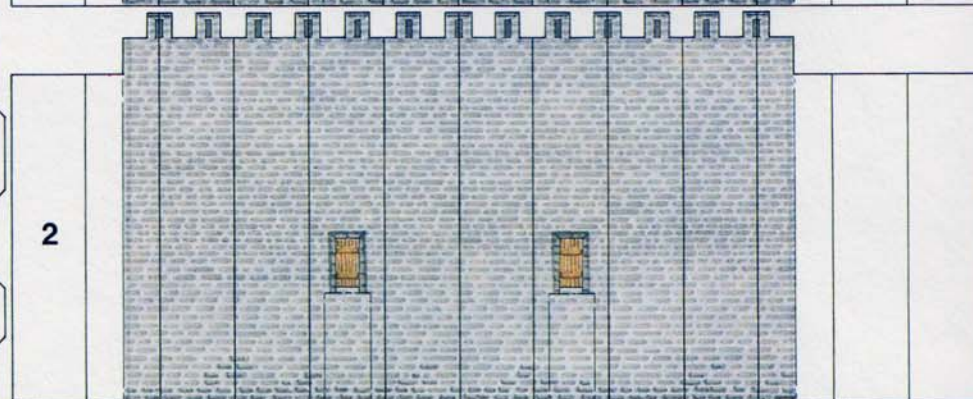
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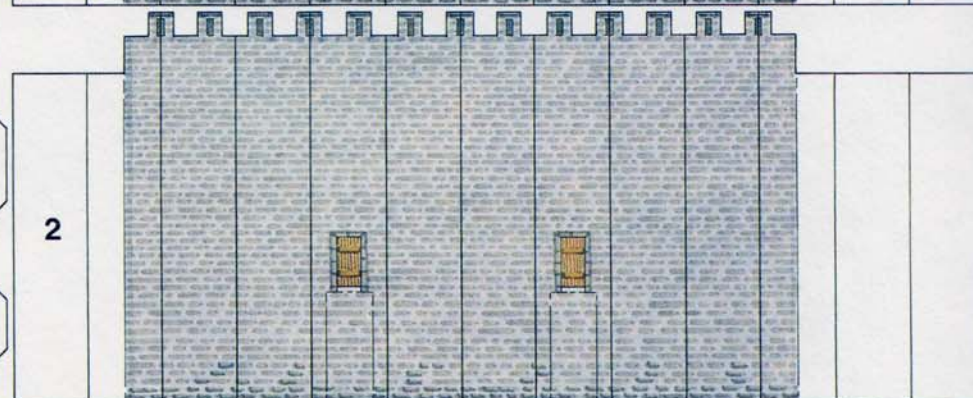
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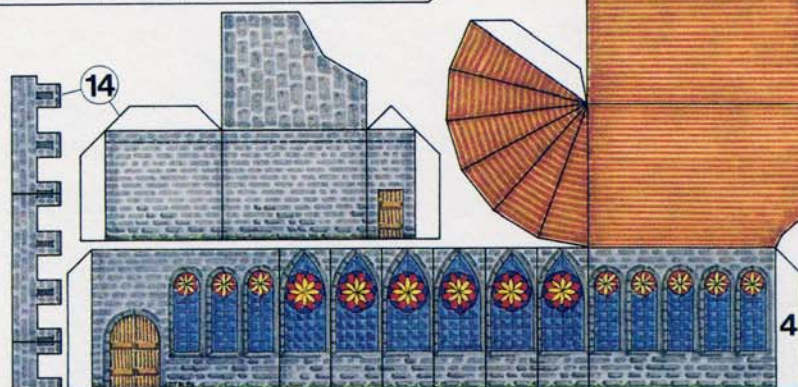
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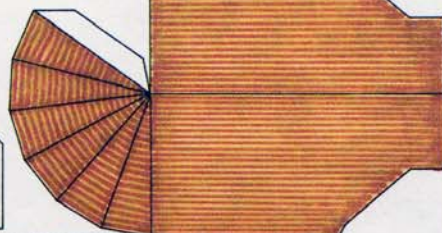
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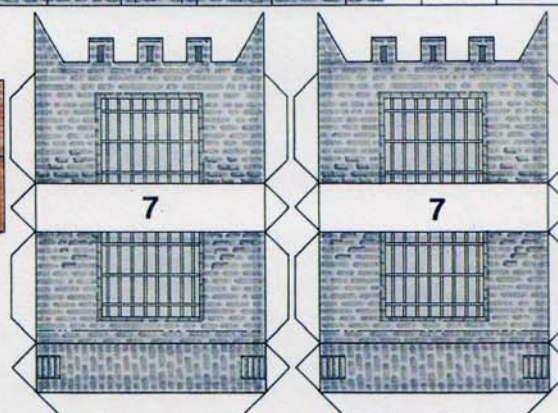
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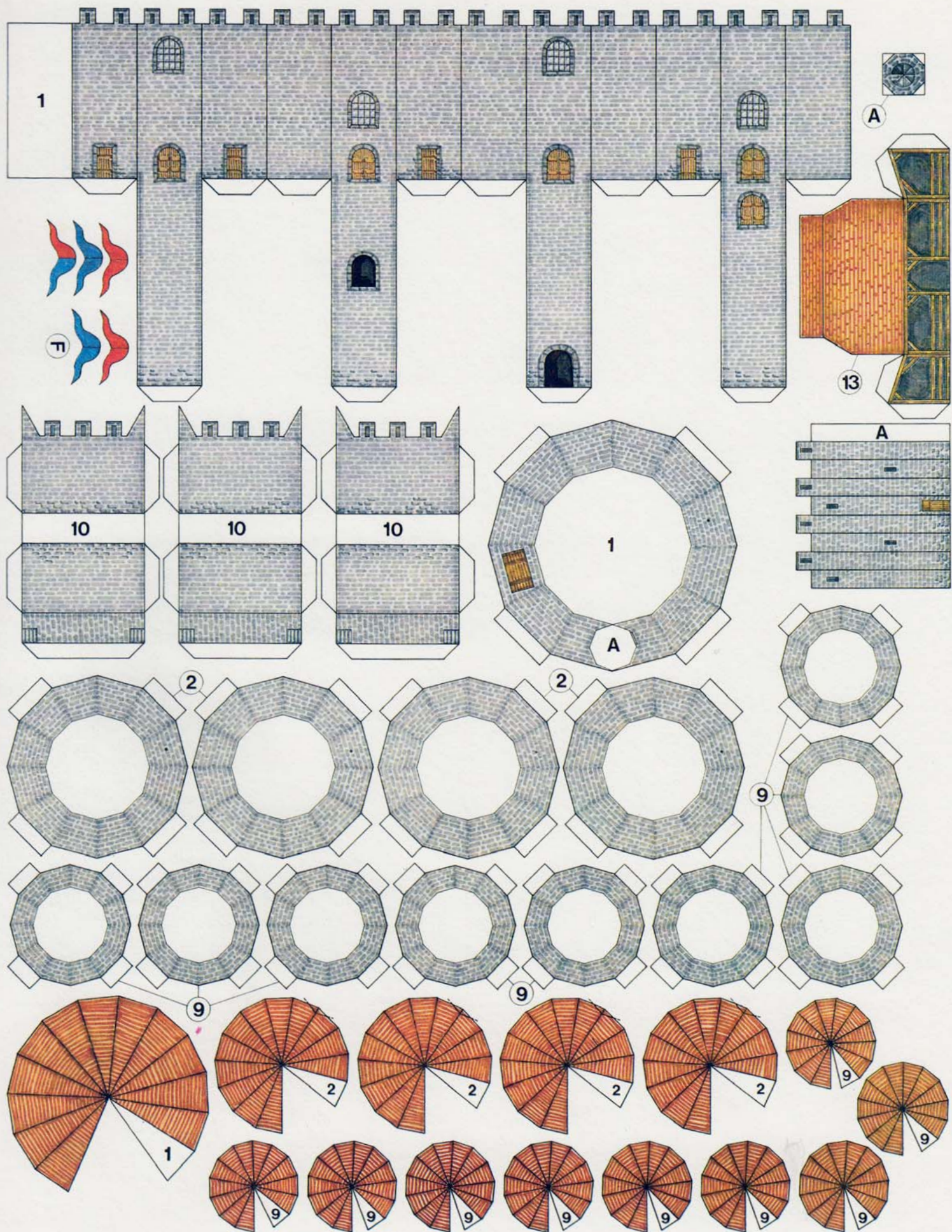


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Streaming Highlights

Critical Role are still on a roll, Misscliiks supports female role models in gaming and geekdom, and Mike Schley peels back the layers of the cartographer's art.



Critical Role

“A bunch of us nerdy-ass voice actors sitting around playing Dungeons & Dragons,” is how DM Matt Mercer self-deprecatingly describes **Critical Role**. But that portrayal scarcely hints at the awesomeness that is one of the most atmospheric, hilarious, and occasionally profane live D&D roleplaying offerings.

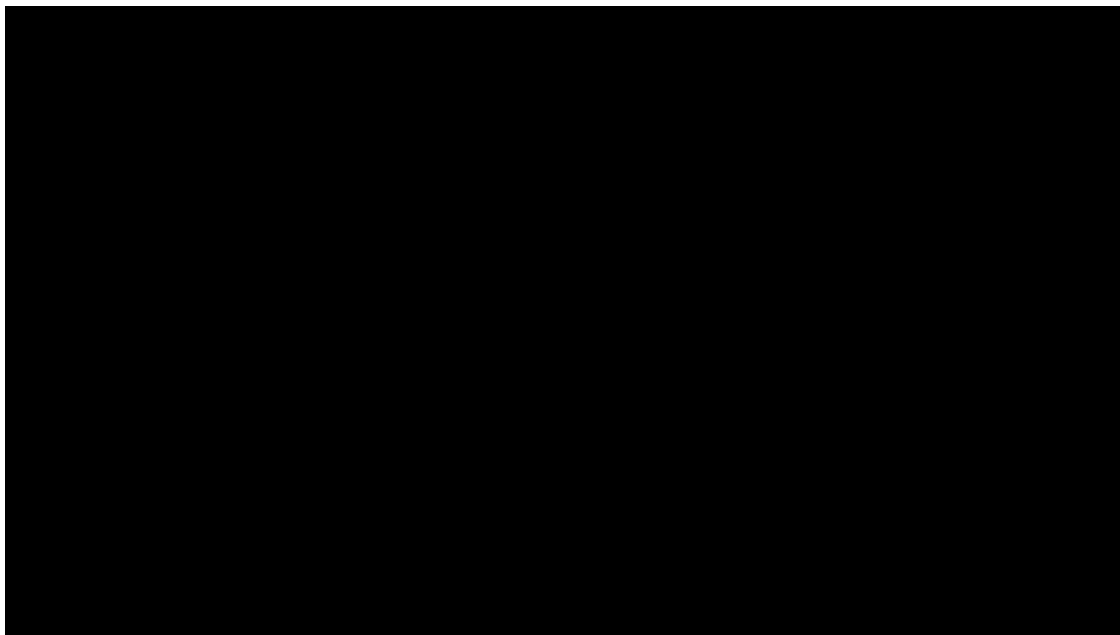
On December 5, Mercer and his players took to the stage live from the Egyptian Theater in Los Angeles to once more gather together as Force Grey: Giant Hunters. Look for the archived version at the Wizards of the Coast website.

[Learn more](#)

Misscliks

Misscliks is a community dedicated to promoting, uplifting, and supporting female role models in geek and gaming culture—a noble cause wonderfully expressed in the range, depth, and quality of the community’s YouTube and Twitch TV programming. Whether it’s unique one-off adventures like *Nimmorgeist*, huge extended campaigns like *D&D Seaborn*, or the selection of other finely curated content, this is one channel you won’t want to . . . ahem . . . miss.

Fans of the community can also catch cofounder Anna Prosser Robinson on the *D&D* Twitch channel’s **Dice, Camera, Action**.



Mike Schley: Time-Lapse Mapmaking

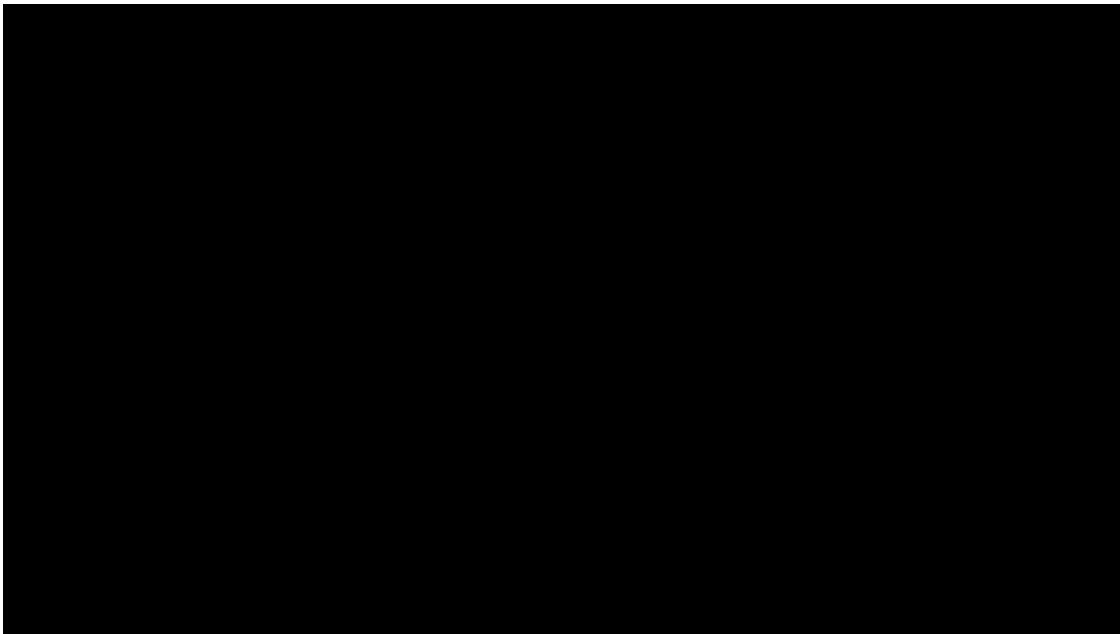
You’ll no doubt have already enjoyed our **interview** with mapmaker Mike Schley, but have you ever wondered how a master cartographer’s map is actually put together? This marvelous time-lapse sequence shows you how Mike builds up successive layers in his cartography, from the detailed pattern of a map’s borders, to the outlines of lands and continents, right down to the fine details as forests, peaks, plateaus, and place names are added. This video makes

for a revealing insight into a master cartographer's art—and is a great resource for players and DMs making maps of their own.

[Watch now](#)

Dan Gelon: Minis Painting

Earlier this issue, we [introduced you](#) to basic techniques for bringing your unpainted minis to life. For a look at more extensive techniques, we direct you to Dan Gelon's previous series on [Painting the Myrmidons](#); Dan art directed the illustrations for these elemental myrmidons, and with that connection, created a three-part video series on painting their miniature representations.



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Unearthed Arcana: Druids

Mike Mearls and Jeremy Crawford sprout new options for the druid



Playtest Material

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game development and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

Druid Circles

At 2nd level, a druid gains the Druid Circle feature. Here are new options for that feature: Circle of Dreams, Circle of the Shepherd, and Circle of Twilight.

Circle of Dreams

Druids who are members of the Circle of Dreams hail from regions that have strong ties to the Feywild. The druids' guardianship of the natural world makes for a natural alliance between them and good-aligned fey. These druids seek to fill the world with merriment and light. Their magic mends wounds and brings joy to downcast hearts, and the realms they protect are gleaming, fruitful places.

Balm of the Summer Court

At 2nd level, you become imbued with the blessings of the Summer Court. You are a font of energy that lends relief to weary feet and respite from injuries. You have a pool of fey energy represented by a number of d6s equal to your druid level. As a bonus action, you can choose an ally you can see within 120 feet of you and spend a number of those dice equal to half your druid level or less. Roll the spent dice and add them together. The target regains a number of hit points equal to the total. The target also gains 1 temporary hit point per die spent, and its speed increases by 5 feet per die spent. The speed increase lasts for 1 minute. You regain the expended dice when you finish a long rest.

Hearth of Moonlight and Shadow

At 6th level, home is wherever you set up camp. During a short or long rest, you can invoke the shadowy power of the Gloaming Court to ward your campsite from intruders. At the start of the rest, you create an area with a 30-foot radius. Within this area, you and your allies gain a +5 bonus to Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect creatures, and any light from open flames (campfire, torches, and the like) is not visible outside the area. These effects end when the rest finishes or when you leave the area.


Hidden Paths

At 10th level, you can use the hidden, unpredictable magical pathways that some fey use to traverse space in a blink of an eye. On your turn, you can teleport up to 30 feet to a spot you can see. Each foot of this teleportation costs 1 foot of your movement. You can also use this feature to teleport someone else. As an action, you can teleport a willing ally you touch up to 30 feet to a point you can see. Once you use either option—teleporting yourself or an ally—you can't use that option again until 1d4 rounds have passed.

Purifying Light

At 14th level, the favor of the Summer Court allows you to end spells that hamper you and your allies. When you cast a spell with a spell slot and it restores hit points to you or an ally this turn, you can simultaneously target the healed creature with dispel magic, using a spell slot with a level equal to the slot used to cast the healing spell. You can use this feature three times, and you regain expended uses of it when you finish a long rest. If the healing spell targets more than one creature, you can use this feature on more than one at the same time, expending one use of it per creature.

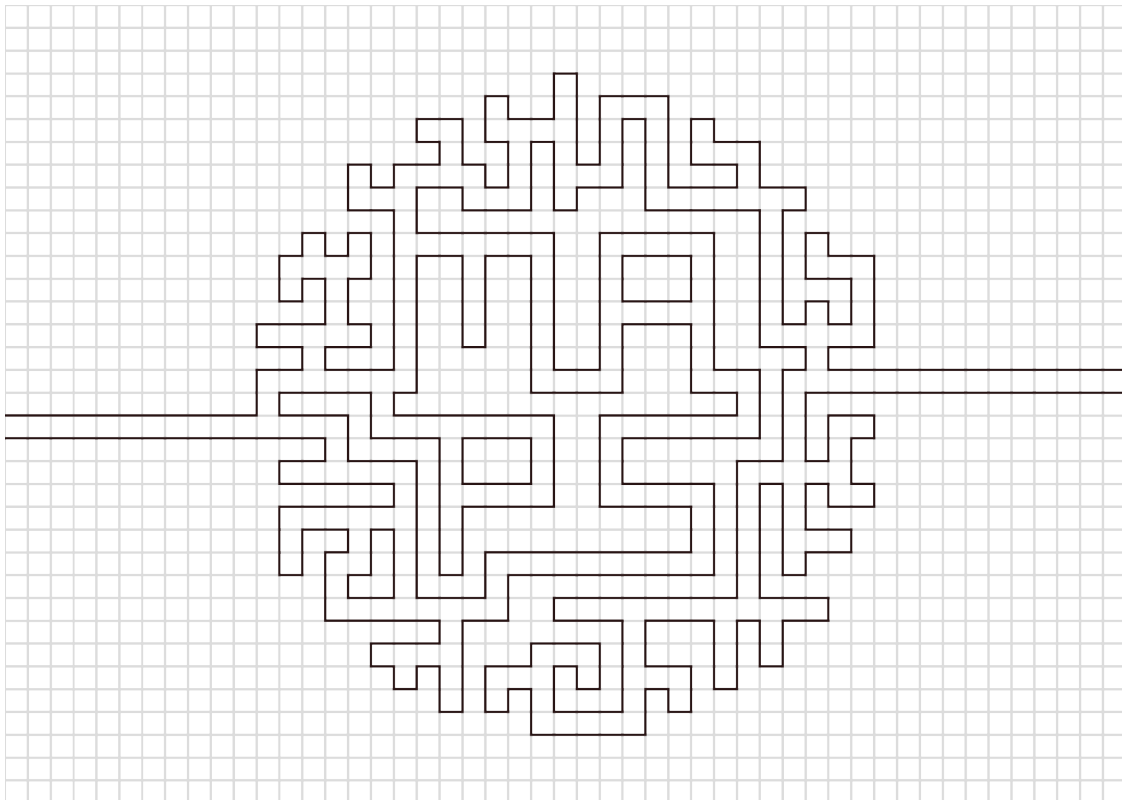
To see the full treasure trove of Unearthed Arcana articles, covering new classes and feats, conversions of rules from previous editions, and much more, [visit the archive](#).



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Maps of the Month: Storm King's Thunder

For this issue, we're pleased to offer a selection of maps from Storm King's Thunder



WARNING: THESE MAPS MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

These maps from the **newest D&D adventure** are available in both tagged and untagged formats for use in your campaigns. As well, the **Fantasy Grounds** virtual online tabletop has added these maps into their map module **here**. To install a new module, place the module file (.MOD file) into the modules subfolder of the FG data folder. The FG data folder can be accessed using the folder button in the upper right corner of the FG launch screen. Each map has been optimized in size and scale for online play, and comes with a predefined grid.

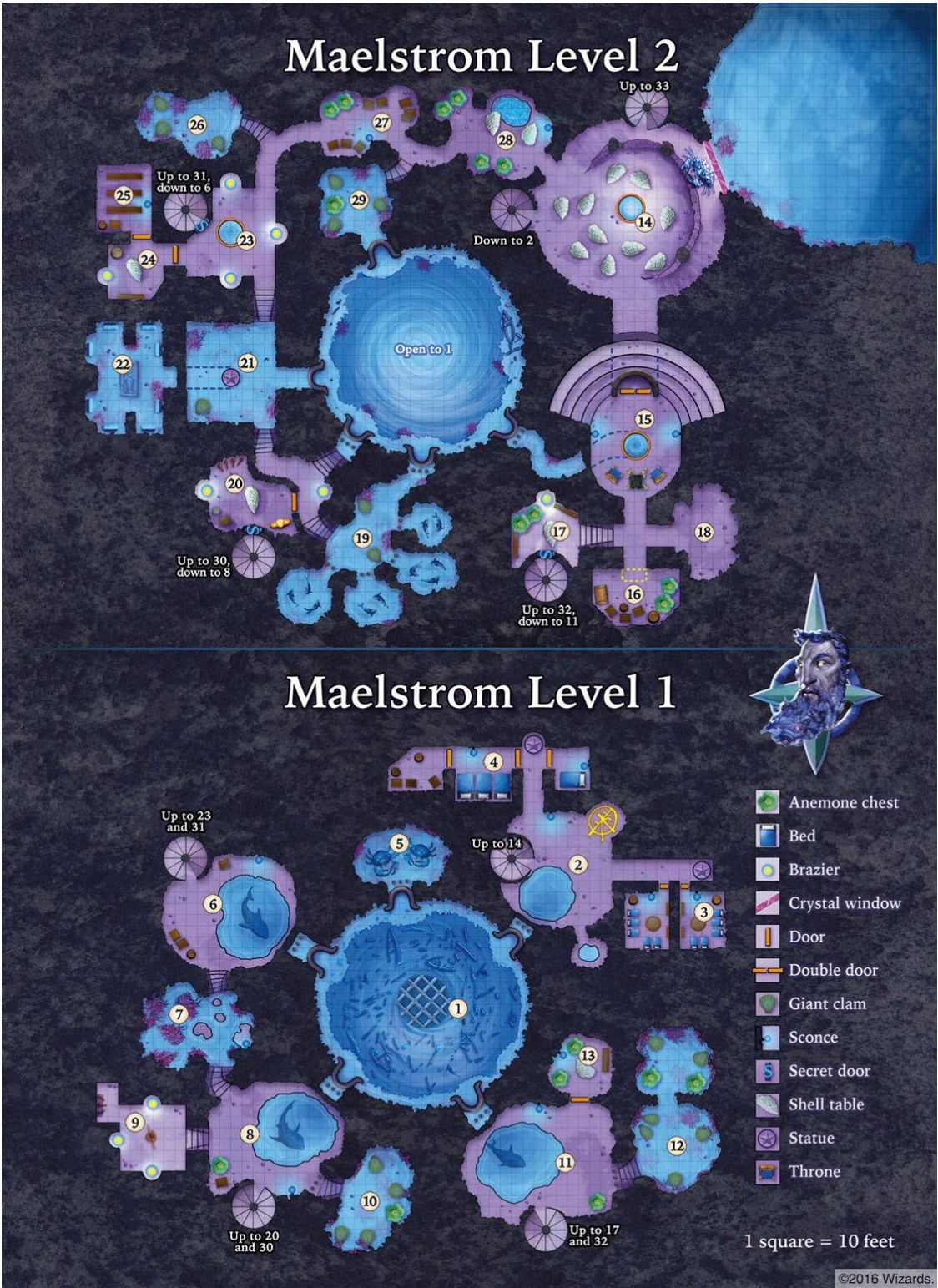
Note that these Fantasy Grounds maps are just a subset of the maps you can find in the full conversion of *Storm King's Thunder*. You can get the full map set, along with pinned descriptions of each location on the map and preplaced encounters, by purchasing the official [Fantasy Grounds D&D Storm King's Thunder module](#).

As always, our appreciation goes out to cartographers [Jason A. Engle](#) (Dragon Cult Airship, Ironslag), and [Lee Moyer](#) (Deadstone Cleft, Lyn Armaal, Maelstrom). To discover more work from these amazing artists, visit their websites.

(And in case any readers missed last issue's content, Deadstone Cleft featured in [a new scenario](#) by Chris Lindsay, while Maelstrom appears in issue 10's [cartoon map](#) by Jason Thompson!)

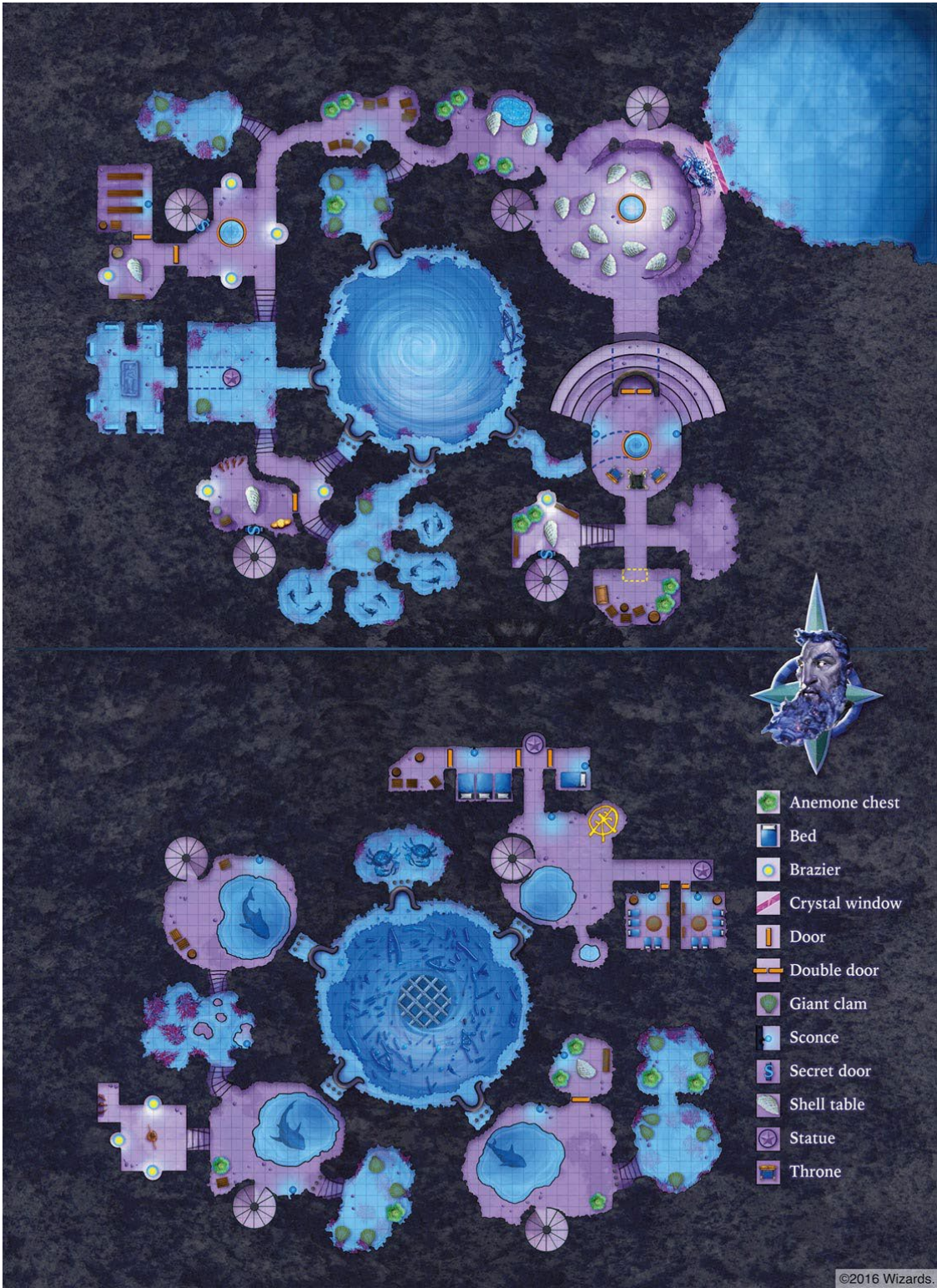
Maelstrom

Tagged



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Lyn Armaal

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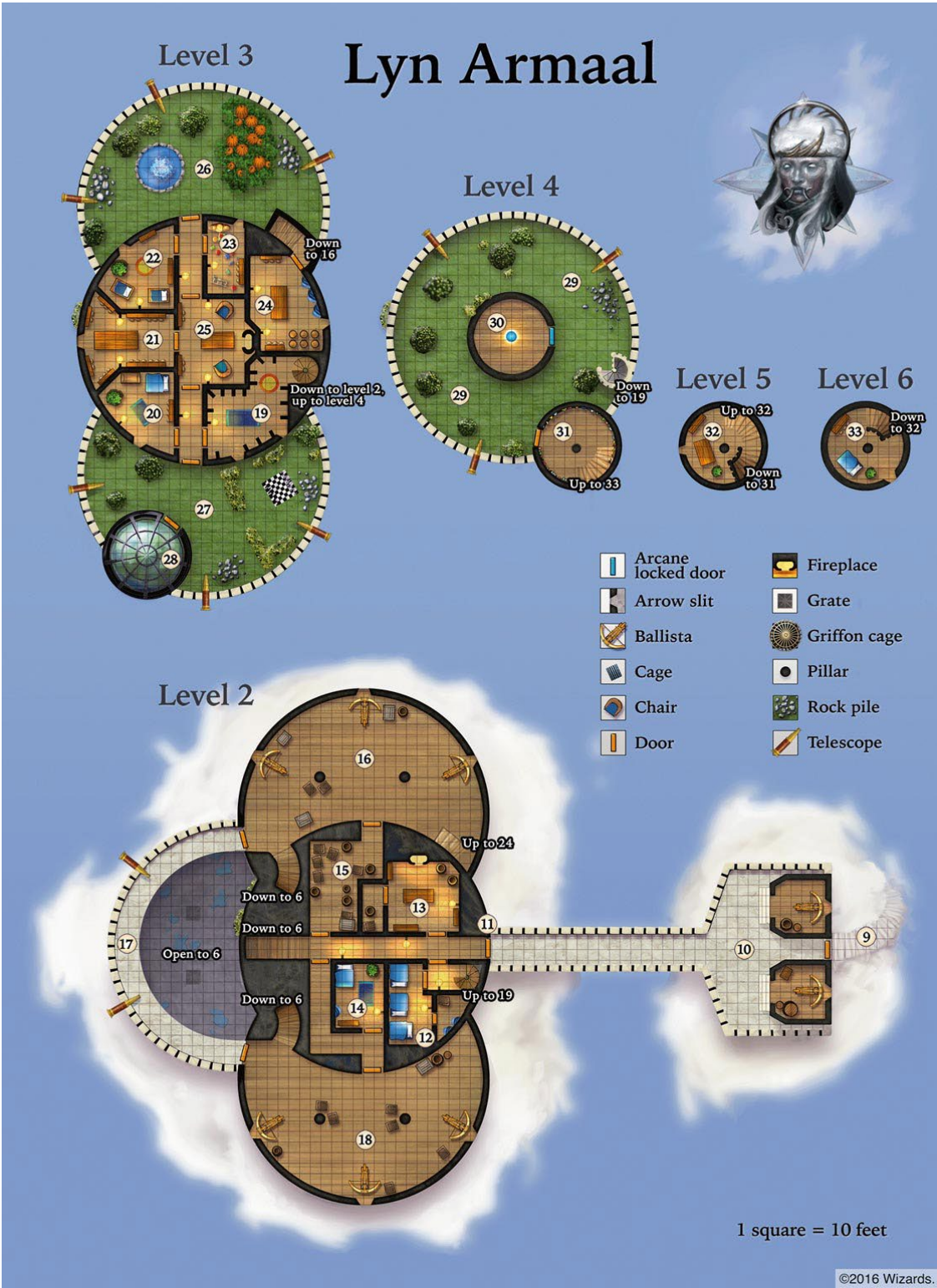
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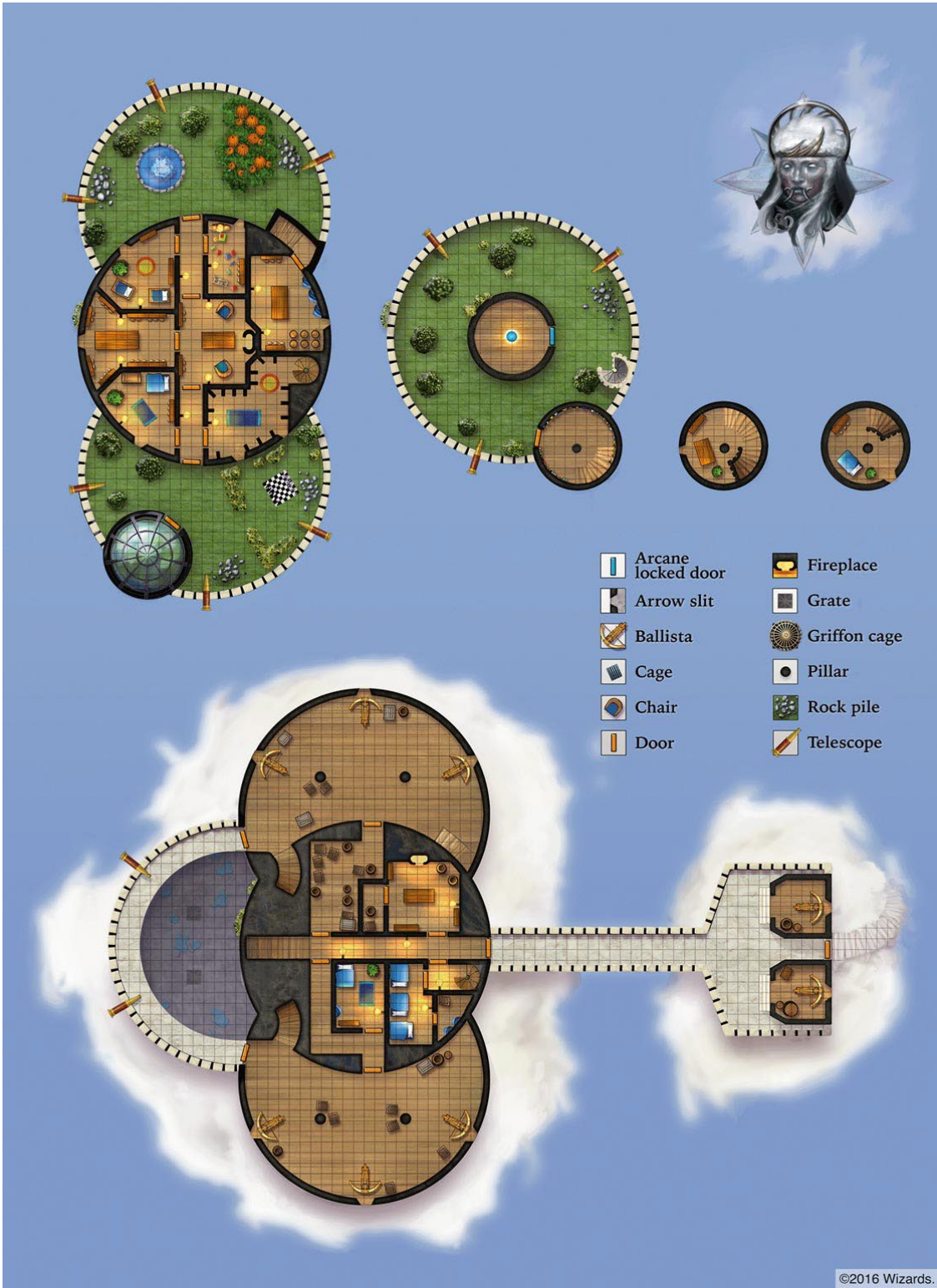
Lyn Armaal

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Deadstone Cleft

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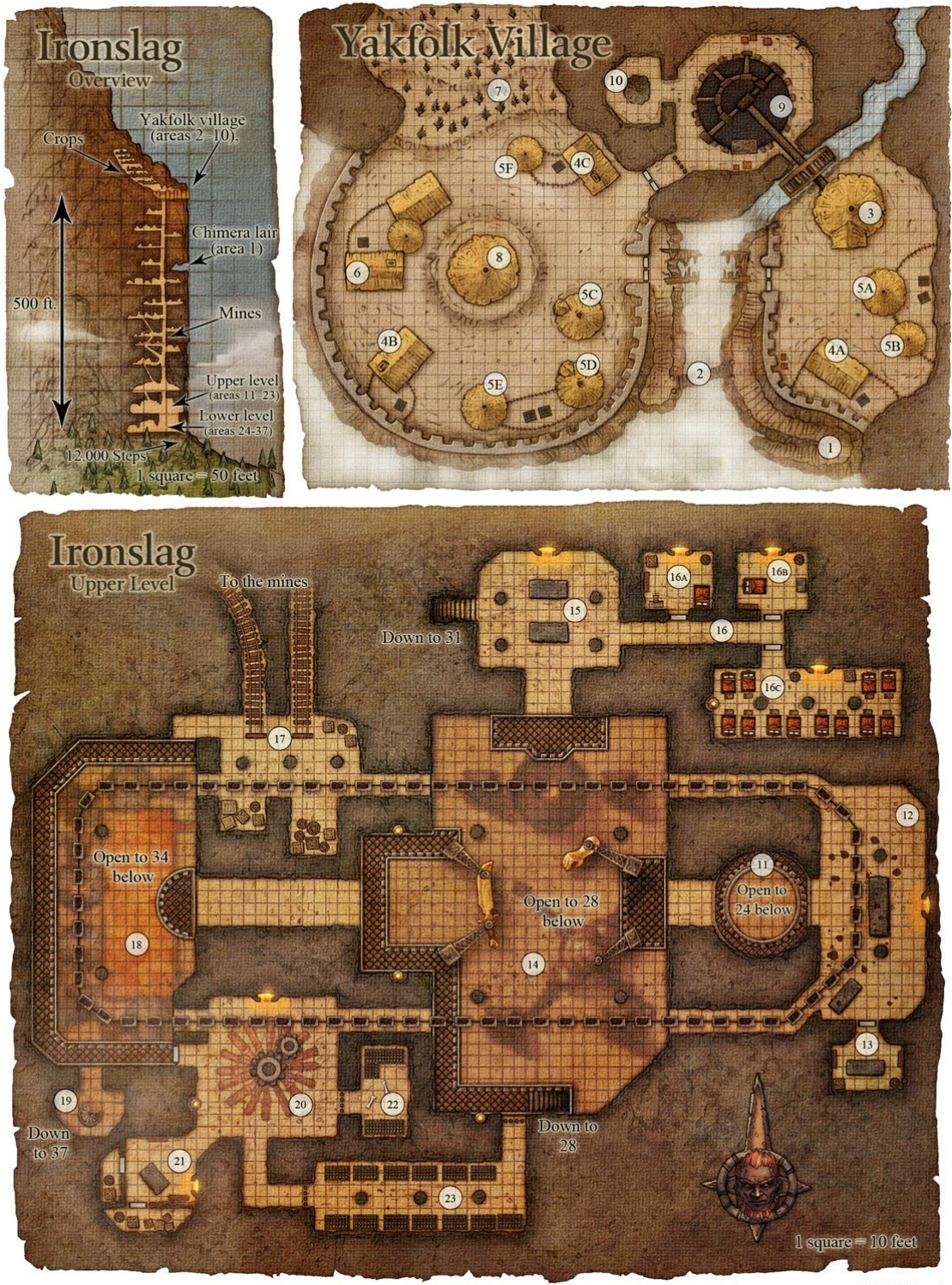
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Ironslag

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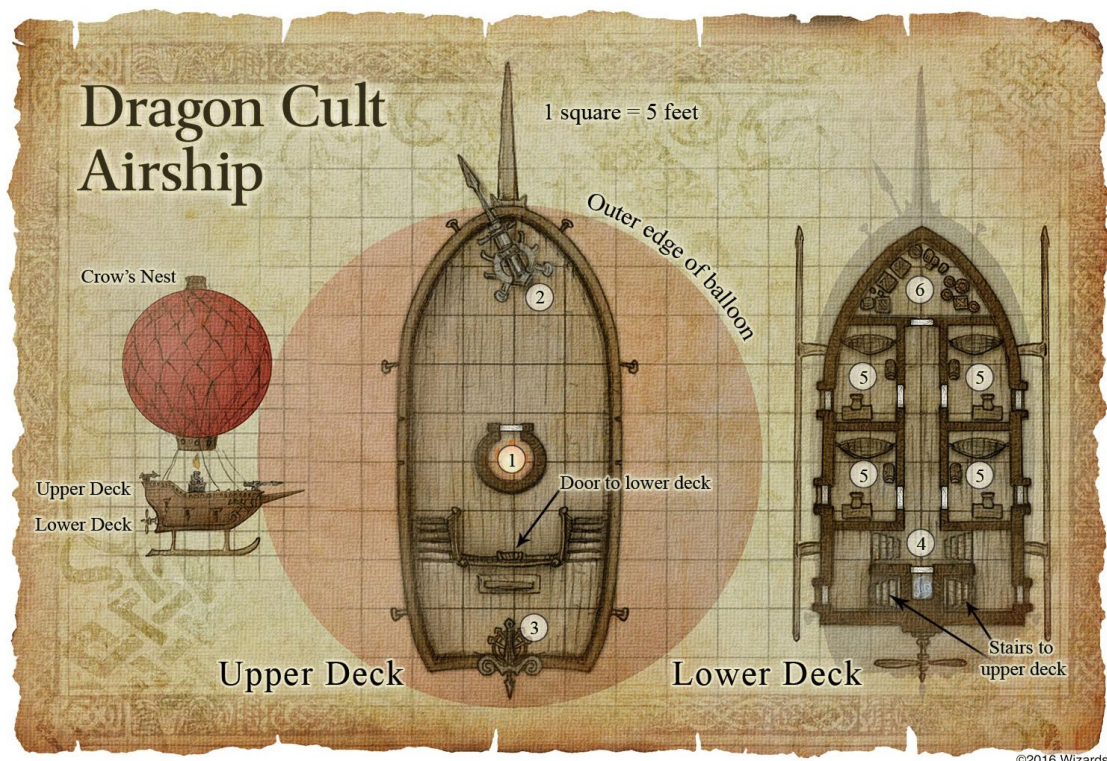


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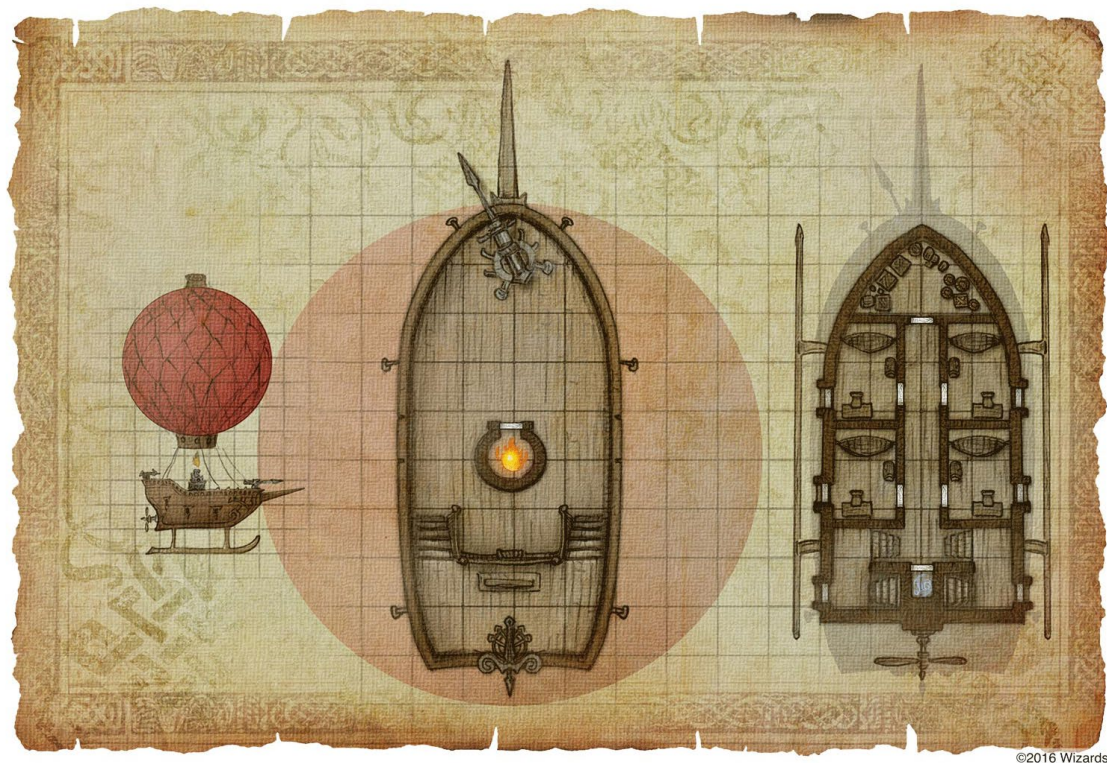
Dragon Cult Airship

Tagged



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Cartographers

And as always, our appreciation goes out to our amazing cartographers; this issue, these include Jason A. Engle and Lee

Moyer.



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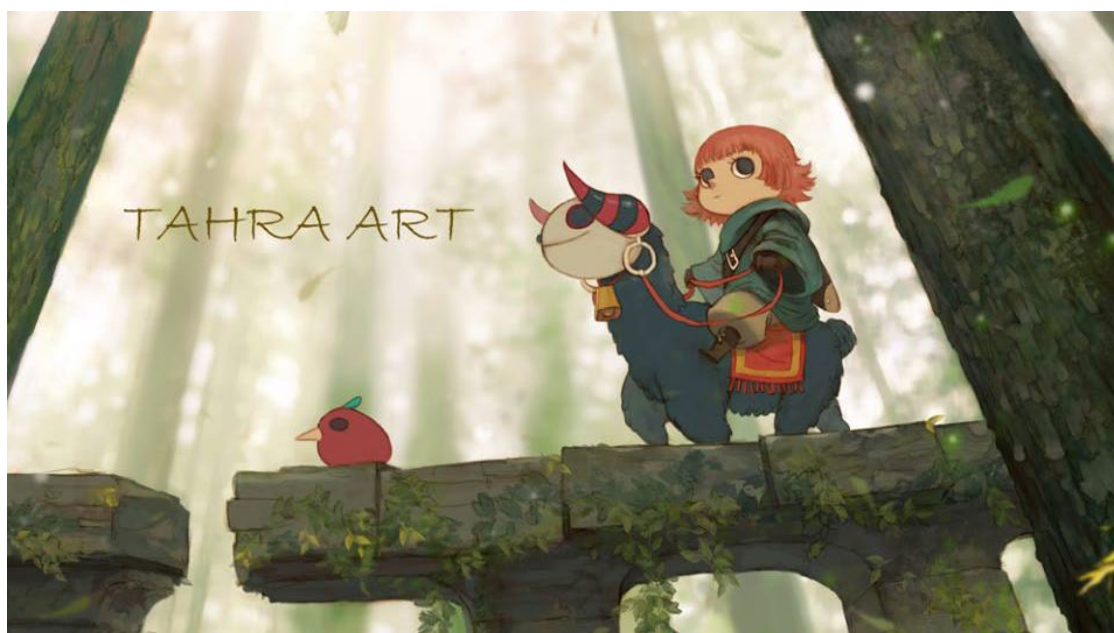
Next Issue: Dragon+ 12

Get ready to be seriously motivated, as Dragon+ presents a special inspiration issue.



We'll be reporting from beyond the tabletop, telling stories of how Dungeons & Dragons has influenced and energized people in their real lives, from creators and crafters, to soldiers and teachers.

We'll also be talking to the real stars of the Dungeons & Dragons show—that's you, of course, the D&D community—for expert tips and tactics designed to help improve the play of Dungeon Masters everywhere.



We speak to South Korean artist Kyoung Hwan Kim about how he created our cover, while D&D's story wizard Adam Lee discusses inspirations for his own world-building and collaborations. We'll have a chat with WizKids about a forthcoming board game, and following on this issue's Paint by Numbers piece, artist Dan Gelon will be here to explore some advanced painting techniques that can really help to sharpen your miniatures game.

Of course, we'll also be full to the brim with regular features like the Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild, the myriad treasures of Unearthed Arcana, our regular foray into D&D fiction, plus new Maps of the Month, and a monster lair comic.

All this, plus an in-depth first look at Wizards of the Coast's next Dungeons & Dragons release, coming in 2017. On that topic, our lips must remain sealed for the moment, but be sure to tune in to *Dragon+* issue 12 this February for the full reveal.

One thing's for certain—it's sure to be inspirational!

(Contents subject to change)



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